

• • THE BASEMENT • •  
PREVIOUS "HOUSES FOR POETRY"

**1991 (1<sup>st</sup>)**

Jayanta Mahapatra

**1992 (2<sup>nd</sup>)**

Shiv K. Kumar

**1993 (3<sup>rd</sup>)**

Kamala Das

**1994 (4<sup>th</sup>)**

Meena Alexander

**1995**

(No Workshop)

**1996 (5<sup>th</sup>)**

K. Ayyappa Paniker

**1997 (6<sup>th</sup>)**

Makarand Paranjape

**1998 (7<sup>th</sup>)**

Shashi Deshpande

**1999 (8<sup>th</sup>)**

Shama Futehally

**2000 (9<sup>th</sup>)**

Githa Hariharan

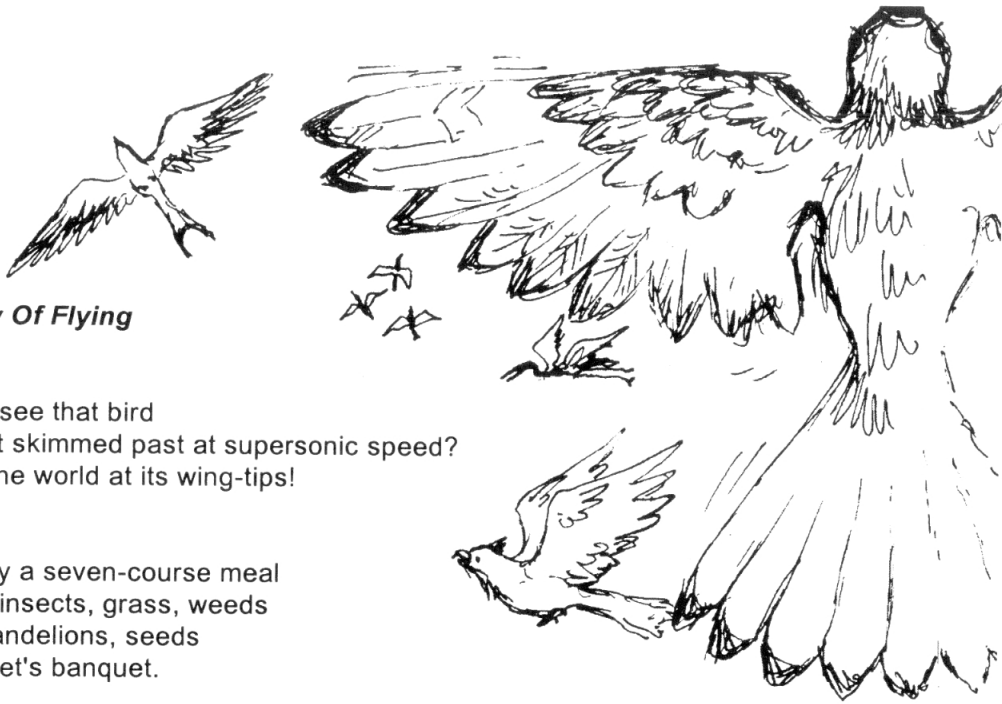
**2001 (10<sup>th</sup>)**

Gieve Patel

**KAVITHALAYA**

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### ***The Joy Of Flying***

Look!  
Did you see that bird  
That just skimmed past at supersonic speed?  
It's got the world at its wing-tips!

Food?  
Each day a seven-course meal  
Worms, insects, grass, weeds  
Pods, dandelions, seeds  
A gourmet's banquet.

Clothes?  
It doesn't wear Levis  
It doesn't go to Raymonds  
But the colours?  
Beige, russet, scarlet, ebony  
Enough to drive designers into madness  
You know, Solomon in his glory  
And all that.

No curfews, no roll calls, no alarm clocks,  
No traffic regulations--  
whoever heard of a mid-air collision  
between a Robin and a Goldfinch?

A dog's life?  
Well, perhaps that's not so good  
But a bird's life?  
That's heavenly!

PAUL L. LOVE



••THE HOUSE••

Children

How are children made?  
I wondered.

Murmuring through the open window  
said the wind  
Not I; for my part,  
I just provide them with musical chords  
for their voice.

I just give them deep colours  
for their eyes  
said light.

I just touch with a smile  
Their tender feet  
Said the scarlet flower.

I just line the confines of their heart  
with love  
said the sea.

I just arm their laughter  
with magical power  
said the woods.

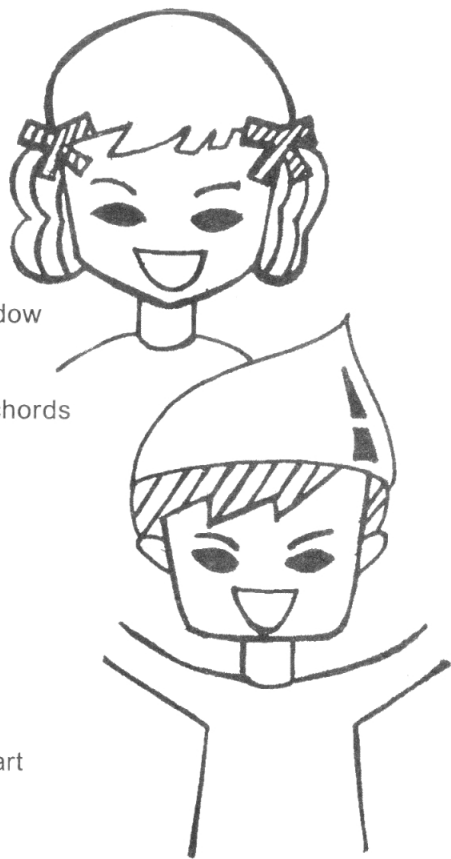


Illustration by  
Rajesh Kumar

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**Hide and Seek Games**

In the recent past  
your pretensions  
tend to become  
uninteresting games;  
Very soon  
one of us  
should quit.

The moment  
you start a pretension  
I know  
how to put an end to it.

See,  
Our children too  
are pretending to be  
children.

Without shaking off  
from the bed  
the thorny words  
delivered for formality  
we cannot sleep.

As both of us are good actors,  
we alone can talk about  
the frivolousness of pretension.

(Manushya Puthiran's Tamil Poem, "Kannamoochigal", translated by T.GANESH BABU)

**Waiting To Get Inspired**

I was sent out  
All alone  
To write poetry  
A crane waiting for a Fish.

MOOVENDHAN, M.

**Fish**

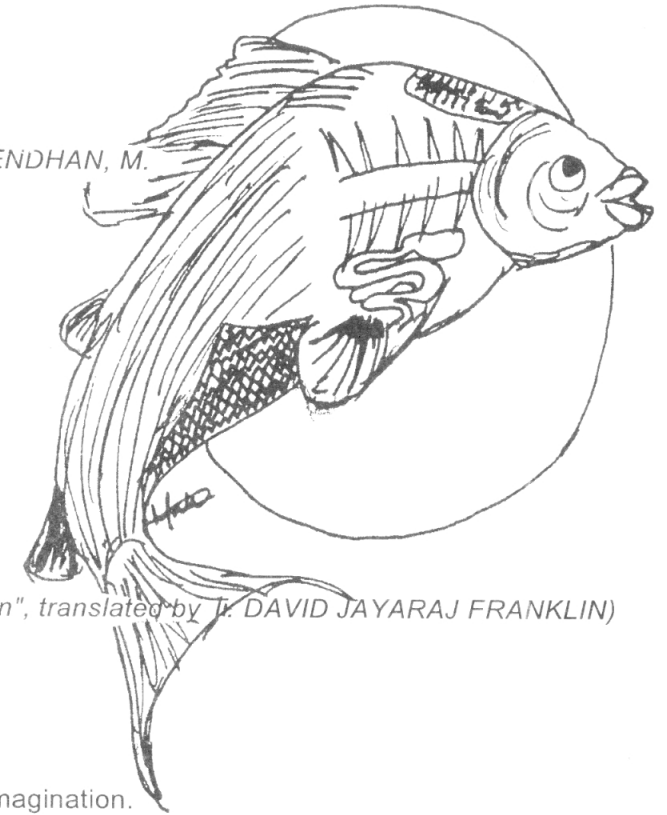
I stood in waist deep water  
The worm  
The hook  
The bait and  
The string  
All in place to catch a poem  
It's down there  
Digging my legs  
Deceiving the bait

(Indhiran's Tamil Poem, "Meen", translated by L. DAVID JAYARAJ FRANKLIN)

**Hunting**

I'm hunting an idea.  
Armed with pen and paper  
I sneak through the woods of my imagination.  
I spot an idea, but it's too frightened to come near.  
Like a rabbit it runs away  
Rather to be placed on this paper here.  
Now I spot another idea;  
This one is not too shy to come near;  
Like a Tiger it runs me over.  
Paper and pen are dropped,  
I stare at the creature that is standing over me  
Amazed that I am capable of such thoughts,  
The idea drags me through the woods,  
Paper and pen are forgotten there.  
My wonderful idea laughs at me and runs away.

JESSICA SCHREIB



**Far Away Home**

The moonless sky.  
With the dark  
alone I walk.  
In the road  
remains  
the light of footsteps;  
The nocturnal singing  
of the trees  
replaces my noisy day.  
The burden  
of an empty tiffin box  
in my hand;  
Beyond the twinkling  
of the stars  
my village lights;  
Shedding the pain  
my legs hasten.  
My house is far away still.

(Suthradhari's Tamil Poem, "Dhooratthil Irukkum Veedu",  
translated by T.GANESH BABU)

||அகஷய||akshaya||சூர்வை||

**Voices**

In us are a million voices  
Singing tunes to worldly dances.  
Voices screaming, moaning, chanting,  
Blind voices, deaf voices -  
Formless, spiritless imposters of sound,  
Fervent phantoms fleeting around.  
Hear them sing in a tempting chorus,  
Or...  
Listen to the silent soul within.

NEEL PATEL

**The Temple of the Bhagavati**

Incense wafts, strong spice, too strong  
For my dizzy mind.  
People pray, murmur, calculating, greedy  
Words - the useless kind.  
They touch their toes, pull their ears, gaze  
At the black body of the goddess.  
I curl my lip in disdainful mockery;  
These minds will never strive to be the broadest.

Thoroughly soaked in the drenching rain,  
They walk in circles; the tiles  
Of this permanent structure offering no protection.  
Weeping, choking on their sour bile,  
White cotton melts as second skin  
To the sun-browned flesh beneath.  
Emotions flood. I run away in anger  
From the grotesque ceremony of death.

VIDYA KESAVAN



### The Indian Bastille

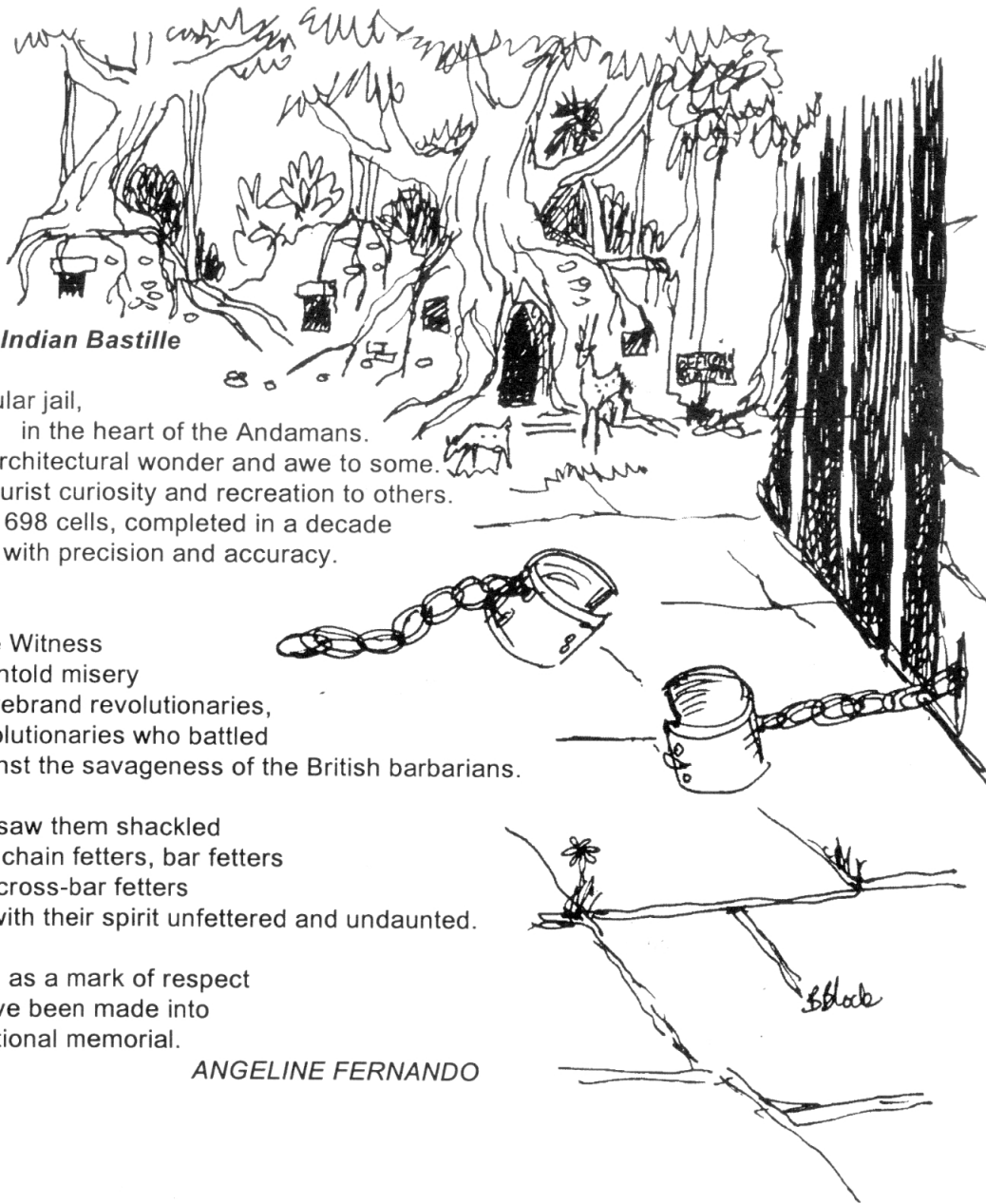
Cellular jail,  
in the heart of the Andamans.  
An architectural wonder and awe to some.  
A Tourist curiosity and recreation to others.  
With 698 cells, completed in a decade  
Built with precision and accuracy.

Mute Witness  
To untold misery  
Of firebrand revolutionaries,  
Revolutionaries who battled  
Against the savageness of the British barbarians.

You saw them shackled  
With chain fetters, bar fetters  
And cross-bar fetters  
But with their spirit unfettered and undaunted.

Now, as a mark of respect  
You've been made into  
A national memorial.

ANGELINE FERNANDO



### Judgement Day

The house burns, the gold showers of sparks  
Blind our eyes with no effect.  
Patterned china flies, jagged porcelain  
Slicing across the faces of the Elect.

Their laughs, unbearable noise, transform  
To visceral screams, long dresses alighting;  
The damask curtains smoke entrapping,  
An awakening with this revenge, blighting

Our trivial, base, meaningless celebrations.  
Figures writhing as the flames lick and taste.  
Charred bills fly throughout the room, but  
No more of them burn than everyday they waste.

Silence deafening, crackling, roaring,  
Searing, but a strange feeling enters me  
Of floating through the vast bottomless sea  
Of experiencing true epiphany.

VIDYA KESAVAN



### White mist covering the green

White mist covering the green,  
Much like the obstacle,  
The obstacle that hinders humans  
Through a path that exposes the human with justice,  
With emotions, passion, and reason.

Through the mist stands out yellow flowers  
Silhouetted through the sepulchral white;  
The sun shining and  
With a rainbow of human colors flowing.

HIMADRI MUKHOPADHYAY

Berlin 11.07.2002

Can you hear the wind in the trees?  
 I hear them whisper to me,  
 About the Sunshine and Happy Days.  
 Can you feel the raindrops on your face?  
 I feel them running down my cheeks like unsalted tears,  
 Reminding me of cruel days.  
 I feel the storm brewing,  
 Like a big pot full of witch brew  
 Bubbling over with thunder and bright lightning.  
 Can you feel the Storm?  
 It moves me with all its grace  
 And it removes my place,  
 In Time and Space.  
 Can you feel the Sunshine?  
 It dries the tears that mothers cried,  
 On the day their sons died  
 Taken by the Storm.

JESSICA SCHREIB

**Air**

Inventions load  
 Impurities  
 In thin air.

ESAYA BRITTO

**Betrayal**

"My joys--her sorrows  
 Her disappointments--my satisfaction"  
 Said she,  
 Proudly,  
 As she  
 took the hands of  
 her foe's lover.

A. ANGELINA

**Urban Constellation**

Through the airplane window  
 I contemplate the terrestrial sky -  
 Night-time Bombay down below

An urban constellation  
 Dripping earthly starlight  
 Across the man-made heaven

Dark sky, dark city,  
 With specks of spurious stars -  
 Heavens mirrored in a vapid sea.

City light scours the endless earth,  
 There's still darkness between the light  
 No stellar glow in its hearth.

Vacuum meets the roving eye -  
 Black holes of Bombay.  
 I gaze from sky to sky.

NEEL PATEL

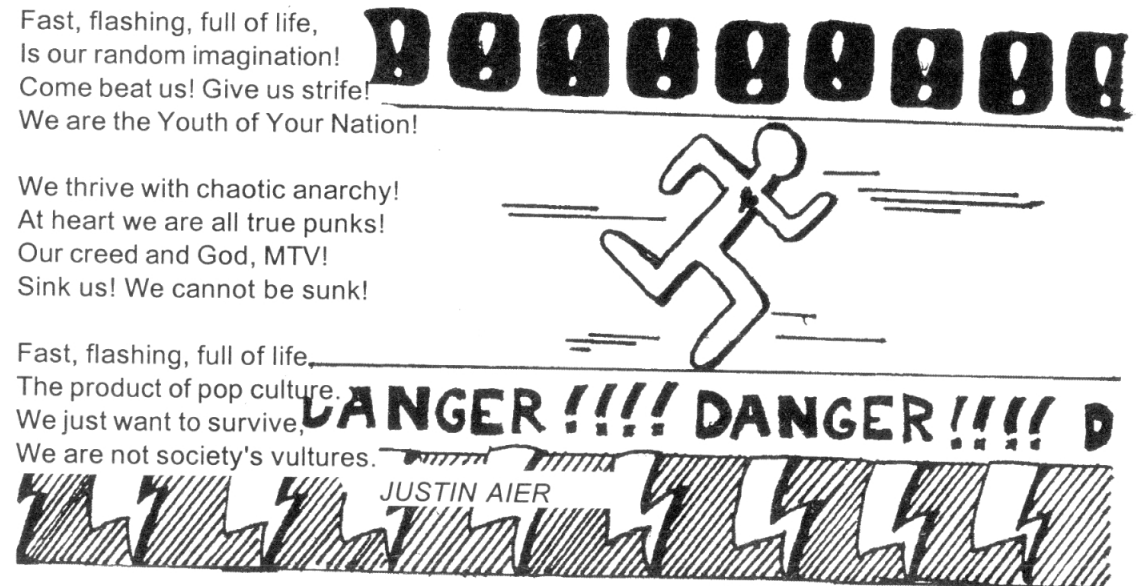
**We Are Not What We Seem To Be**

Fast, flashing, full of life,  
 Is our random imagination!  
 Come beat us! Give us strife!  
 We are the Youth of Your Nation!

We thrive with chaotic anarchy!  
 At heart we are all true punks!  
 Our creed and God, MTV!  
 Sink us! We cannot be sunk!

Fast, flashing, full of life,  
 The product of pop culture.  
 We just want to survive,  
 We are not society's vultures.

JUSTIN AIER



**I Want To Be Crushed**

I saw a girl  
Writing poetry while walking  
Leaves, grass, mushrooms  
Everything crushed under her foot  
My heart too...

MOOVENDHAN, M.

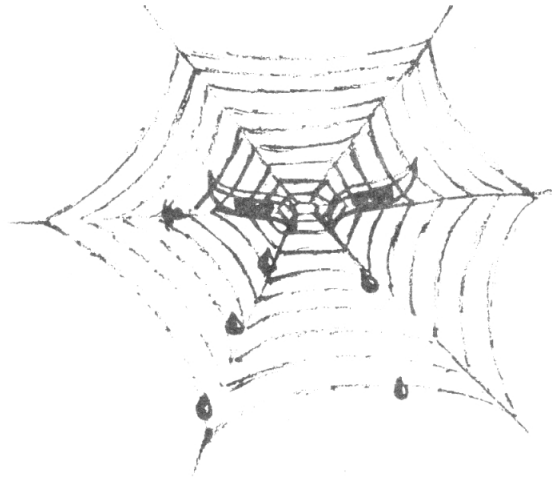
**Trapped**

I am trapped in my memories.  
They have spun a tight web around my eyes  
I only see my present  
Through the mists of the past.  
I am trapped,  
In my memories...  
They have spun a web of cotton  
Around my head.  
I hear the words of now  
In the voices of yesterday.  
I am...  
Trapped...  
In my memories...  
My vision blurs  
Under a curtain of tears...  
I cannot touch the people I see  
They are faint and distant

Fragments of Now touch me...

Kicking and screaming I fall  
Back into my dream...  
And I am trapped in my memories.

JESSICA SCHREIB

**Utopia**

In a world that disintegrates by machines,  
For a generation that resorts to the bullet,  
Nobody cares about the next person,  
With every self interest, utopia slowly diminishes.

Much like the soot that distorts the fireplace,  
And opaque glass that blocks the beyond,  
Humans too are blocked by the opaqueness of the mind.

With the clearing of the mind,  
Just as fog lifts over the land,  
Human minds will forsake the selfish instincts,  
And live for the next person.  
Finally arises the greatest victory - Utopia.

AVIVA GOEL

**Cherub**

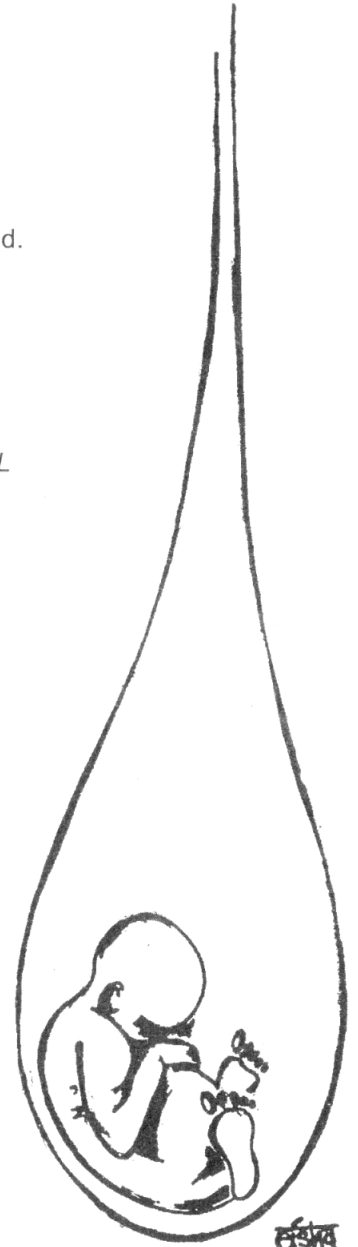
Like a dewdrop,  
Like a pearl in its shell-house,  
The little darling  
was safe in her mother's womb.

Dreams in the mother's mind  
Shattered by fate were  
taken out of the womb.

She looked at her baby  
Fair, cute, alluring.  
She touched the babe

Held the little darling  
In her arms  
The body was cold.

E. ESTHER PRABA





**The Ordeal**

It's night.  
My weary eyes carry me to bed.  
But I dread.

Oh! The foregone sleepless night.  
Staring at the concrete white devil,  
Exorcising my ghostly thoughts,  
The more I fight, the more wakeful I am.  
Defeated, I jump out,  
Take a stroll, awaiting the slumber.  
I return and stretch out on the not-so-cozy mattress.

And sleep? No way.  
My neighbour's snore,  
Like an unrhythmic score,  
Never allows me a wink.  
High and low, he snorts.  
Irritated, I rouse him. "You're snoring." I yell.  
I return.  
'Grr...rr.' There he goes again.

His dry, loud snore; my hard, unrelenting thoughts:  
I'm all worn out!  
The clock strikes three.  
I doze off to nothingness, the fruit of exhaustion.

I wake up fatigued.  
And relate my ordeal to my friend.  
After keen listening, "It's insomnia." he says.  
"Wow! I've learned a New Word."

ESAYA BRITTO

**Untitled**

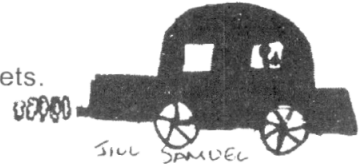
Age no bar,  
4 wheels, an engine and testosterone,  
No other qualifications required.  
Men of all ages come forth and prove your mettle,  
Bring with you the gift of Henry Ford.

Hearts racing, pistons pumping,  
A potent mix of adrenaline and fuel  
Surge through the bodies  
Of man and his machine.  
To join the 2 in blissful union in the streets.

Red changes to Green.  
Static to dynamic.  
Fantasy and dreams explode into reality  
Ladies and Gentlemen: The Races have begun.  
Fear us in the streets....we reign supreme  
Till the lights of day begin to gleam.

SIMON J. FERNANDES

9/8/2002

**That**

Whether I have accomplished  
something or not  
that "something I should do" has been endlessly  
lingering in my mind.

Yes.  
I should definitely do something.

But,  
What is that?  
That is what  
I am yet to discover.

S. AARTHI



**Let Me Be**

Let me be  
what they think  
I am,  
to them.

Let me be  
what you think  
I am,  
to you.

Let me be  
what I think  
I am,  
to me.

BUT  
what do I think  
I am?

Let me be...  
Let me be...

S. REKHA



**Nikon, SmileTaker (On A Camera)**

I stare. I smile at the SmileTaker.  
The lens closed, not smiling,  
Inscribed, AF, Nikon Lens 34mm 1:4.5,  
Wonder how many smiles are recorded?

Only smiles???

ESAYA BRITTO



**Searching**

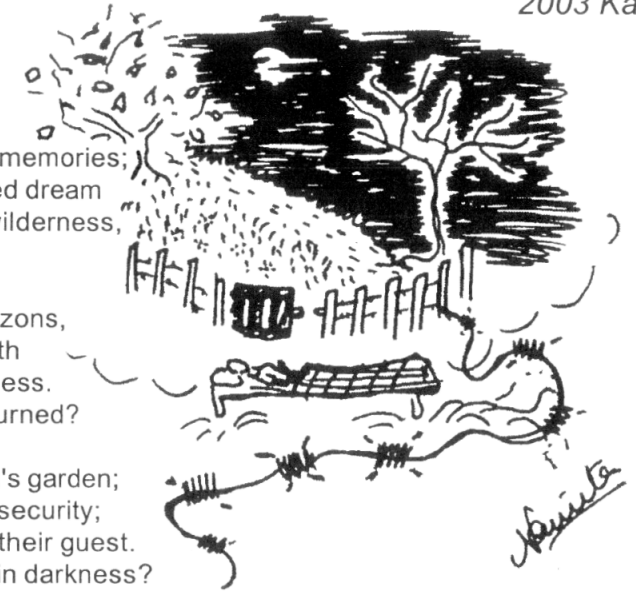
Thoughts in time, decayed memories;  
The fragments of a shattered dream  
Lie scattered in circles of wilderness,  
Burning in hopeless desire.

Strange lands, strange horizons,  
Pierced by the fears of death  
The dream fades into darkness.  
What was the desire that burned?

Jagged boundaries of a fool's garden;  
Beyond them lie visions of security;  
Swinging wide to welcome their guest.  
Is the desire here? Hidden in darkness?

Has the desire been buried?  
The desire that masked helplessness  
Was just a yearning to transform dreams  
Into a balm for the reality torturing us.

AVIVA GOEL



**Day Break**

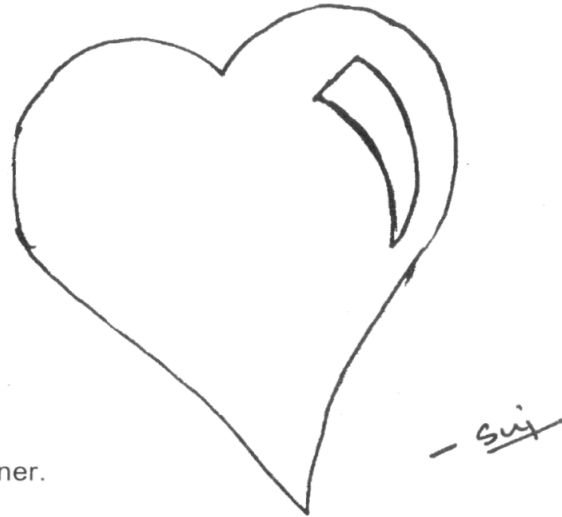
The sun makes slow progress  
through the sky  
the moon makes a hesitant departure  
birds rise to the occasion  
bees buzzing around  
obesities jogging with their pot bellies  
Water taps surrounded by women-folk  
Men newspaper in hand waiting for coffee  
Children reluctantly creeping out of bed  
Milk man clanging his bell  
at each door, street lights  
disappearing as sun strikes--Ascending  
to make the day  
Hot-Hotter-Hottest.

DAVID KAMLESAN

**Love**

It was bed time  
 I in my bed and  
 He near me, heart so gloomy  
 "Will you leave me?" he enquired  
 in a voice so crazily.  
 "My mum dead and gone  
 had love and affection  
 buried deep with her last evening  
 And I am all alone" said he.  
 My heart felt so heavy  
 Fears enfolded me  
 Words too abandoned me.  
 "No, but how long?  
 I'll miss my parents, my studies"  
 Said I  
 Like a loving daughter and a dutiful learner.  
 "You miss, but I lost..."  
 And he broke into tears.  
 With great agony and predicament I said  
 "I go but still I am here  
 to comfort you  
 to solace you  
 leaving my love  
 beside you.

J. REETA CHRISTINA



**Paper**

Cut trees, to produce  
 Paper  
 To write of deforestation.

ESAYA BRITTO

**All that we don't say . . .**

Blinding sight, gift of the Prophet,  
 Bleeding roses on thorns of love,  
 Death is a blessing of God,  
 Falling on hot dew like a blade.

Life, a complication for Man,  
 Contemplating such simple solutions,  
 To explore the mysteries of death,  
 We turn to life and love to find asylum,  
 But is everything an illusion?

Illusions to please the heart,  
 The soul remains untouched and unwashed,  
 Cleansing feelings gush over me,  
 White light surrounded by blue shimmering,  
 I felt the breath of death pass by,  
 And then the cold winds blew.

DULCINEA M.



**Stump**

Now standing still,  
 A ten inch stump,  
 Ashen and drying.  
 How glorious you stood,  
 Proud eucalyptus tree,  
 Amidst joy and tears,  
 or years you endured,  
 All gone in a moment...  
 Nature weeps.

BINU M. DANIEL



**Inside Out**

Tick Tack, ..... Tick Tack

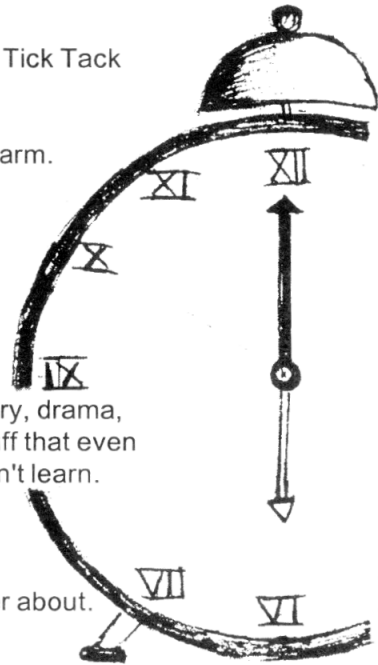
6 O'clock  
Brr\_\_\_eeps the alarm.

8 O'clock  
To college  
The classes--poetry, drama,  
Prose, fiction--Stuff that even  
Their creators didn't learn.

2 O'clock  
Back home  
Rest, play, wander about.

6 O'clock  
The clock's made full circle,  
Unmoved yet tracing the minutes,  
Untiring.

But I move...



*I wriggle on the Bed.  
Recoil to consciousness.  
Tumble out,  
Wash, brush, dress,  
Look over the lessons.  
The same monotonous tasks.*

*Tired of listening,  
Trying to unlearn.*

*Refreshed,  
Relaxed,  
I ramble carelessly.*

*...tired of the routine.*

ESAYA BRITTO

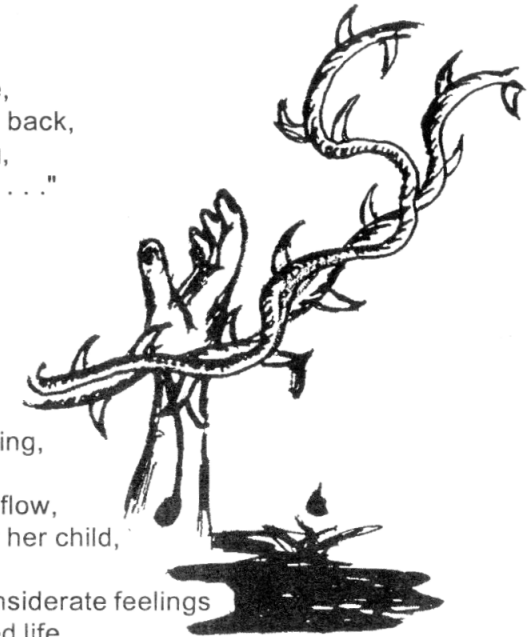
**Lifelong Symphony**

Shadows of our past,  
Reminders of the holy presence,  
The warmth of his breath on my back,  
Knees trembling, doors banging,  
"A bittersweet symphony of life . . ."

Mountains are majestic,  
But so am I,  
Like the queen of all that lives,  
But a crown of thorns,  
This is my symphony of life.

Everywhere . . . life is approaching,  
With a new zest for living.  
Streaming past in a tumultuous flow,  
Like an angry mother calling for her child,  
In a honeyed voice,  
My jealousy buried in your inconsiderate feelings  
The bittersweet symphony called life.

DULCINEA M.

**Card Game**

Life is a game of cards  
Thought I,  
In my first shuffling  
I picked out hearts  
Then I realized  
I was in Love.

Life is a game of cards  
Thought I  
In my re-shuffling  
I picked out the Joker  
Then I realized  
I was Ditched!

K. BHARGAVI



**Premature**

Dormant mind,  
Word-tides that ebb away  
Into a forgotten idea.  
Adjectives that quarrel  
About what I really mean.  
Sense that turns to nonsense,  
"What am I trying to say?"  
Pens that scratch spirals  
where legible words should be.  
The child not yet born  
And which may never be  
But wait, wait...  
An unexpected birth...  
I've borne my poem.

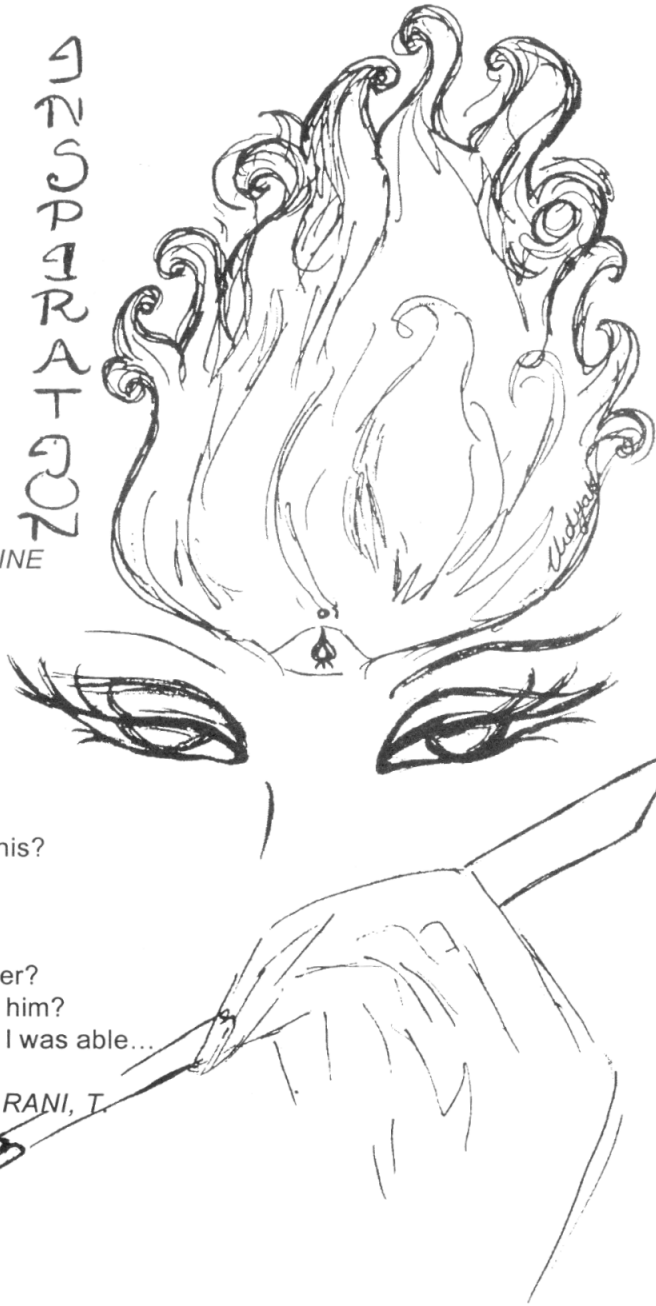
JANE PAULINE

**Had I . . . ?**

Had I known him?  
Yes, of course!  
Really known him?  
I guess, not really!  
Then how the hell did I get into this?

Couldn't I have stopped myself?  
It wasn't mandatory!  
But, to get involved with a stranger?  
Oh! he isn't really one! Yet, why him?  
Shut up!, thank heavens at least I was able...  
to RELATE!

ESTHER MEDLYN RANI, T.



**Superstitious? Not !!!**

I saw a man turn hurriedly  
at the glimpse of a black cat  
that walked ahead of him.  
I laughed.  
I watched a woman  
rebuking another  
for asking where she was heading.  
I was amused.

A girl cried "two for joy"  
on spotting two crows.  
I sniggered.  
I heard a woman  
say 'Thank God!'  
when a funeral procession  
went by.  
I was horrified.

Does the dog realize  
that his howl predicts doom?  
Or does the lizard know  
that his clicking  
will make someone's wish come true?  
Is life determined by these?  
I choose to believe otherwise--  
Touch Wood!!!

DEEPTI JAYARAJ

**Untitled**

Prædators and Preys  
Somebody's loss is  
Somebody's gain  
Today's Principle  
Of survival.

ANITA CAROLINE, T.

