



# Third Eye





Third Eye



# The Highest Genius

**T**he development of the Divine in man would be called the Third Eye, or the Eye of Tapas, mano — vritti. Thapasi is from the root 'Tap' in Sanskrit meaning 'to burn.' This has a dual role. Turned inwards the burning is an internal process of cleansing Samskara or purification. The five doors of perception are under the perfect control of the mind (manas) to such a cleanser. His inner faculties of thought are the best fields for the cultivation of true literary crop. Such products can stand timelessly.

## The Biggest Census

**H**E WAS waiting for me at the door, the little door that was the entrance to my cubby-hole, which for convenience I used to call my "room". If someone asked me, "Where are you going?" I would say, "I am going to my room. However, I rarely invited anybody to come to my room.

Yet, here was this tall stranger waiting for me. I knew he would come some hour of the day. There was no avoiding him. He was reading the little encomiums written in my name by the boys to of the street (scribbled in pencil)

"Boys in the street are a nuisance," I said, by way of conversation, "Give them a piece of charcoal and they become vandals."

The census man was not interested; I opened the door and let him in. He was tallish, so he had to stoop down to let himself in. I hoped against hope that my dirty clothes would be somehow arranged and my few books in order.

He seemed to take in everything at a glance, "It is nearly seven," I said, "do you have to work late into the night?" My idea was to attract his attention to a beautiful Queen Anne pocket watch hung by a silver chain on the wall. It was my most prized possession, the one thing that in the eyes of the children next door gave me an air of opulence. But the census man seemed hardly to notice the importance of the pocket watch on the wall.

"Who lives next door?" he asked me casually.

"The landlord and his family." Anybody else?"

"Well, he has rented his backyard to three other families."

"Your room is also part of the house?"

"Yes."

"Your occupation?"

"Writer."

"Which means 'journalist,' he said, half to himself.

"If you like it that way," I smiled.

"Your age?"

"Thirty-five."

"Married?"

"Yes"

"Monthly income?"

"Supposed to be ninety rupees."

"What do you mean, 'supposed?'" he interposed.

"That doesn't come in the census," I said irritably. "My pay is 90 rupees, but I haven't seen the colour of a green note in ages"

"You are Indian, of course?"

"Do you doubt it?" I snapped.

He ignored my irritation.

"You and your wife occupy this room?" I nodded my head. I knew he was thinking something pretty nasty.

"Any children?"

"None"

Well. That settled him. He closed his note book.

"Do you have to ask all these questions at every house you go into?"

"It is not easy," explained the census man, "but we are determined to do our best"

"What about all these people sleeping on the roads, in parks—the beggars, the lepers...?"

"Every one is taken count of," he said "They belong to the 350 million people of India—that is—Bharat"

**T**HE CENSUS man stooped low to get out of the room again. Just then my wife, who had gone next door to knead the flour paste, came in. I shut the door in the face of the census man once my wife came in.

(Contd. page 31)

PORTRAIT OF A MILITANT

The third day of continuous curfew  
 third month of the State's blockade  
 the bloody siege is on to recapture Jaffna.  
 The Army's advance seeming surer  
 accompanying, news of civilians hacked  
 this break of dawn promises only despair  
 and the peninsula feels trapped.

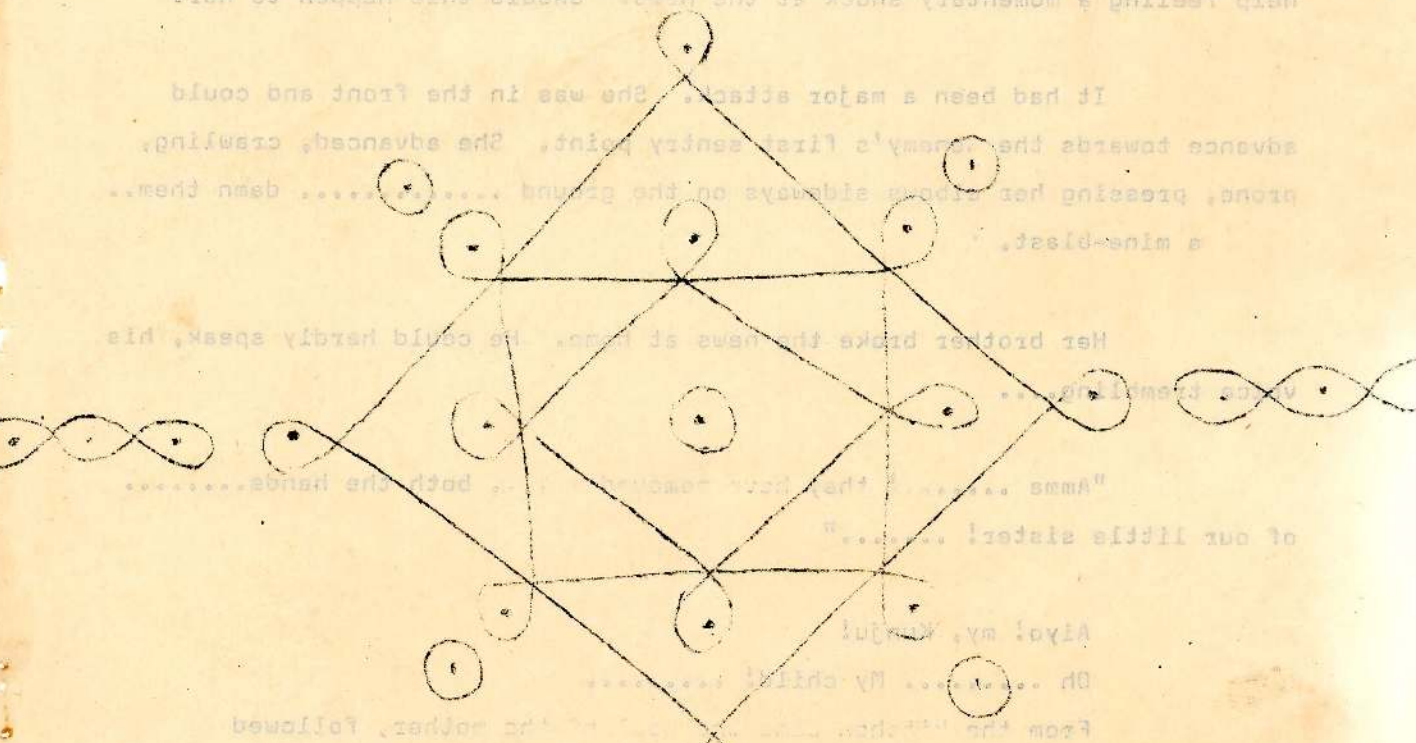
But two ten-years olds, with their pots  
 perched precariously on parents' cycle seats,  
 amble chattering squirrel-like to draw water  
 in our common village well.

The village overhears one boy saying to the other:

"Machan, before I get killed I'll kill  
 at least one damned soldier."

24th August 1990

SURESH



VEERI

She was an expert at throwing hand grenades. She always carried two with her. If she was asked why she would say

"These should be sufficient for me in an attack."

"They are increasing their military strength. They are getting down sophisticated arms and equipment ... and tanks!"....

"That's true, even we have to improve our war tactics. We have no other choice. For us, weapons are only the means to our ideal, not the end itself"

She loved talking to the people.

"We have to create a political awareness among our people. We, too, have quite a lot to learn from their way of life and customs".

Her views were broad and deep, unflinching determination ablaze within her. Her ferocity in the battle field was as potent as her strong views. The enemy never failed to detect the vehement rage of her hand bombs.

"Our people are suffering so much! They've left their homes, lost their belongings ..... We must drive them out of here; We must liberate the rest of our land too!"

It was not uncommon in the battle front. But one could not help feeling a momentary shock at the news. Should this happen to her!

It had been a major attack. She was in the front and could advance towards the enemy's first sentry point. She advanced, crawling, prone, pressing her elbows sideways on the ground ..... damn them.. a mine-blast.

Her brother broke the news at home. He could hardly speak, his voice trembling....

"Amma .....? they have removed ..... both the hands..... of our little sister! ....."

Aiyo! my, Kunju!

Oh ..... My child! .....

From the kitchen came the howl of the mother, followed by her staggering foot steps to the front door.. steadying

herself. Everything seemed blank before her.

"When did this happen ..... where? ..... and how?....."

He jumped on his rickety old bicycle and she hopped in front, still shaking. He peddled as fast as he could using all his might towards the General Hospital.

This was two days after the incident. Only the mother and brother were permitted to enter the General Hospital. When they went up to her bed she was still lying - unconscious. So they could not speak to her. That which glared upon their eyes were the stretched out elbows which were covered with pure white bandages .... reflecting the image in the national flag.

He struggled to control his mother from bursting into loud sobs, though he himself was convulsed with threatening tears which he could barely control. In hospitals you are not supposed to cry aloud.

The agony within them had not, as yet, subsided. The roots of agony was still throbbing deep within them. But time had dried their tears. They went to see her again, and the son told the mother "She must be feeling very hurt, amma, don't worsen it by starting to cry there. Try to comfort her if you can."

They went to the base to see her, for, she had refused to be taken home. She wanted to go back to her base.

"I want to be in the base or in the field" she had said, "not at home."

She had become very obstinate.

The mother was dumbfounded as she entered the base. She stood still overwhelmed with wonder at what she beheld. So was the brother. She was drawing a picture holding the brush in her mouth.

A few moments elapsed. A girl approached and saw their astonishment.

"This is no wonder at all. She is even learning to write with her toes!"

The picture was a beautiful one. The sky with dark heavy clouds crowding it, and a solitary bird flying across.

She had been clever from her young days. Her enthusiasm for drawing had blossomed when she was in the primary school. She used to draw a circle and a straight line from it downwards, two small vertical lines on both sides of the straight line below the circle and at the bottom of the line. She usually named this 'mother' and she would draw another similar one and call it 'father'. But when she was in grade eight she drew very well. Those drawings were so good, that they could make her teacher press those hands, those two hands which drew them, to her eyes.

He could not take his eyes off the picture. What was this? The wings of the bird were missing but it appeared to be flying swiftly. How could that be? How --- without wings v-----

Impulsively he blurted out

"The wings have not been ....."

He stopped in sudden realization.

She turned, and understood what he meant.

"When did you come? Amma, why are you so silent?"

She looked down at her picture.

"This is how it is, anna this bird has no wings. Do you know the title of this picture?"

They had come to comfort her, but it was she who had to comfort them.

"Do you think a man who has fifty lakhs, would worry over the two rupees he had lost? Not at all. We have lost only two hands, we have fifty lakhs more".

They both went home silently, this time with wonder and pride.

What confidence, she talks as though she has lost nothing. What absolute courage! when she was smaller she could never endure pain. She would turn the house up side down for the smallest wound. But now! Every thing depends on how one is brought up! She is drawing now -- and writing and do you know what she has been asking her friends lately!

"Do you think, by fixing artificial limbs I could practice throwing bombs again?"

S.P.Sivanesh

(Translated by Luckshmi)



MY HEART LEAPS UP .....

Little girl, I see you pedalling  
 Down this road every morning  
 What's your mission? What's the hurry?  
 What's the reason for this flurry?

Your brother rots in a foreign clime  
 Your father lies maimed for life  
 With a merry cheer you pedal away  
 Your frustrations and tears and sighs!

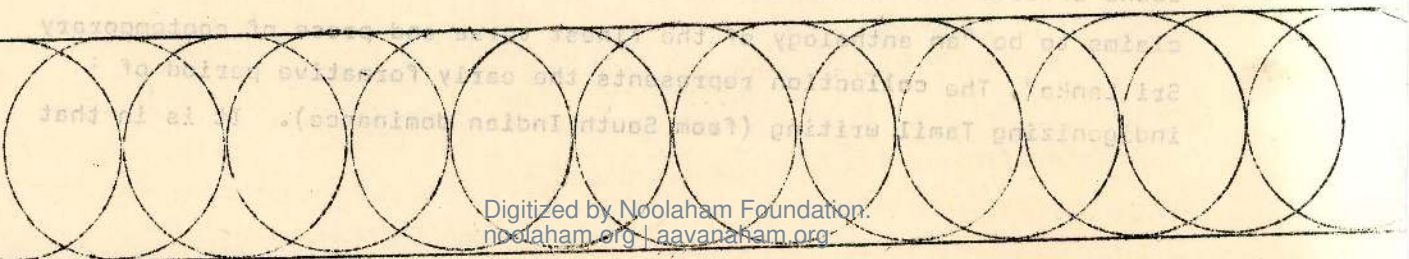
With your dear mother on the pillion  
 Through the streets with teeming millions  
 Slender calves stretched and strained  
 I see you on your cycling rounds.

Little girl, my heart leaps up  
 As I see you with your load of love  
 Little girl, with you my land  
 Is shaping its own destiny!

(Translated from the Tamil original by the author)

The bicycle is the poor man's mode of conveyance.  
 But, in Jaffna, with the ban on fuel, motor vehicles  
 no longer ply and the bicycle is the only mode of  
 transport. Out of sheer necessity, women have started  
 cycling. But still there are older women who cannot  
 ride a bicycle and a small girl taking her mother on  
 the pillion is a common sight.

S.PATHMANATHAN



THE POLITICS OF ANTHOLOGIZING CONTEMPORARY TAMIL LITERATURE: A REVIEW  
OF PENGUIN NEW WRITING IN SRI LANKA.

The collection of poems and short stories, Penguin New Writing in Sri Lanka, is a pioneering attempt that for the first time brings together the literature of the island's three linguistic traditions within the covers of a single book. Prof.D.C.R.A.Goonetilleke who has edited the collection is of course aware of this significance and claims the honour for himself in the first sentence of his editorial introduction. In addition to the image of the pioneer, he casts himself in the role of a rebel. He argues that the collection is a corrective to the narrow mindedness of outsiders who have "generally turned a blind eye to (Lankan literature) regarding it a mere extension of the literature of India or as being of no consequence" (p.ix). However laudable this project, it is also a bit too ambitious. A person who engaged in such an enterprise has to be familiar with the literary tradition of each language, if not with the languages themselves, in order to give a balanced and authentic representation of these diverse traditions. For non-Tamil readers the collection will probably provide the first glimpse to the Tamil literary tradition. It is therefore important to review how the Tamil literary tradition has been represented in the collection, given the progressive aims of the editor.

A casual perusal will reveal a surprising fact: the editor states "Biographical data not available" for some of the nine Tamil writers represented. This is all the more puzzling in the case of R.Murugaiyan who is not only a veteran poet (coupled with Mahahavi for ushering in the contemporary Tamil renaissance) but one who is still living and (what is more) working as a Senior Assistant Registrar in the quite conspicuous University of Jaffna. Furthermore, the repeated references to Nuhuman as "a young Tamil poet" in the editorial introduction and the blurbs is misleading. Nuhuman is in his late forties and is not young when we consider quite respectable poets in the contemporary scene like Karunakaran, Illavaalai Wijendran and Cheran who are in their early thirties.

This evident unfamiliarity with the contemporary Tamil literary scene affects the collection in more serious ways. Although the book claims to be "an anthology of the finest verse and prose of contemporary Sri Lanka", The collection represents the early formative period of indigenizing Tamil writing (from South Indian dominance). It is in that

sense that Mahakavi and Murugaiyan are significant. But any discussion or developments thereafter cannot leave out figures like Jesurajah, Cheran, Vilvaratnam etc. Apart from these young poets who reflect the resistance against Sinhala "imperialism" from a nationalist or Marxist standpoint, there is the even more recent development of writers in exile who express their experience as refugees in western capitals. The question, then, is not only one of chronological comprehensiveness but representation of significant strands of the literary tradition.

To one familiar with the Tamil literary tradition the anthology indeed looks a haphazard selection based on personal choice and accessibility. While most of the seminal and influential figures in the contemporary scene are left out, some of those included will not find a place in any Tamil scholars' history of contemporary Tamil literature. Although Thambirajah's "Funeral Pyre" (1960) is a remarkable achievement, he hasn't written much of similar quality or of a sizeable quantity after this. Selvarajah is little known to wider Tamil audience as a poet although he has achieved some popularity as a mass media performing artiste. If he is a poet, he is only a self-claimed poet (to paraphrase slightly his own nom-de-plume "self-born King of Poets"! ). It is not accidental that both these writers are based in Colombo and associated with well recognized institutions (i.e., American Centre and SLDC, respectively). The editor would have had easy access to their writing, if not known them personally. Needless to say, to gain access to other writers in the "liberated zone" of the North, an editor has to work extra hard.

As a result of such selection, the Tamil section fails to represent some of the pressing socio-political concerns of Tamil society which have been finding powerful expression in this literature in recent times. That is, Tamil nationalism and the resulting armed struggle for self-determination do not find expression in this collection. The closest that comes to this theme is Nuhuman's "Murder"-- a Muslim writer's reactions to the burning of the Jaffna Public Library by the Sinhalese security forces in 1980. But this poem does not ( and cannot be expected to) authentically express the aspirations such periodic state sponsored violence has given birth to among Saivite Tamils. In fact, there is a dearth of political themes in the Tamil section-- a matter that has become a fact of life for Tamils since at least 1977. Ironically, in the collection, the English section looks more politically conscious and alive to the times than the Tamil section: Jean Arasanayagam's "A country at war" discusses the ethnic conflict, while Anne Ranasinghe deals with the initial JVP

rising and Reggie Siriwardene with the "terror" following the JVP revival in their poems. This omission is glaring in the case of the Tamil community which is now "enjoying" the international stereotype of a highly politicized, militant, "terroristic" group of people. Readers might go away with the impression that these political themes haven't yet found expression in Tamil literature. Many readers will certainly think that the reason why such themes are not reflected in their literature may be because their politics is inadequately culturalized or even because such attitudes/aspirations are those of a minority within the minority.

The themes that do find expression in the Tamil section are those which were concerns of the fifties and sixties, such as the caste conflict.

Other themes such as the concerns of women, Estate Indian workers and Muslim community give voice to certain concerns internal to the community. All this do serve to reflect a literary tradition that is ethnically diverse and rich when the Sinhala tradition appears homogeneous. It is indeed fortunate that the Indian and Muslim communities are given representation when the Jaffna-Tamil-Saivite ethos tends to dominate the Tamil tradition. But to do this at the cost of neglecting the nationalist theme is grievous. Eventually the impression one might get is of a community preoccupied with internal diversity, if not conflicts.

Indeed to give a realistic picture of contemporary Tamil writing one has to publish much that is being written in de facto "Tamil Eelam." Although those who wrote till 1985 (in the landmark collection "maranaththul Valvom"-- Let's live amidst Death), such as Jesurajah, Cheran, and Vilvaratnam, were more radical than the older generation of poets who gradually became sensitive to the nationalist cause, such as Mahakavi, Murugaiyan, M.Ponnambalam and Ramalingam, the post 1985 writing is even more committed and subversive. This in fact includes many cadres who have been writing from the battlefield. Many such collections of short short stories and poems have been released in recent time in Jaffna. This includes the collection of poems by the 18 year old school girl Vanathi who died in the Elephant pass battle in 1991. Although there is much in this genre of "committed" writing that is slogan-like, dogmatic, and reductive, there is also writing that is complex and aesthetically effective.

But such stuff will definitely be difficult to handle by Prof.Goonetilleke. This point is not simply that this will challenge the

ideological standpoint of the editor, but that this will also grate against the dominant ideologies of the Sri Lankan state and publishing industries like Penguin. It is interesting in rare moments to see how the editor experiences these ideological tensions (and wriggles out of them!). It is now generally accepted that the Police burnt down the Jaffna Public Library on the eve of the 1981 District Council elections when some senior ministers of the UNP government were present in Jaffna. Nuhuman's poem "Murder" talks about this incident. But the editor's footnote to this poem says, "Jaffna Public Library was burned down in an incident of ethnic violence" (p.239). The footnote conjures images of Tamil and Sinhala civilians fighting each other with sticks and stones in the vicinity of the library when accidentally the library caught fire! The footnote is a misleading euphemism as the poem Unambiguously refers to the part played by police and ministers in the incident. It will be interesting for a Reader Response theorist to study what a reader who doesn't know the actual historical background of the incident will make of the poem. The clash between the footnote and the details in the poem will produce a variety of confusing interpretations which will serve only to distort the pungent theme.

If Prof. Goonetilleke is uncomfortable with a poem which talks about an act of cultural destruction, it can be imagined how much more difficulties he will have with poems which talk about mass killings of civilians by security forces, condemn state terrorism, question the sovereignty of Sri Lankan state, seek a radical restructuring of society and voice aspirations of a separate state. Such writing will be uncomfortable to the Sri Lankan state. In fact, some of the recent writing will militate against the very act of publishing Tamil literature as "Sri Lankan". They expressly seek to be defined as the literature of a different nationality. We must also note that publishing industries have their own hidden ideological positions. Penguins can not tolerate their publications to become a vehicle for separatism or communism, however much they would like to capitalize on the recent media attention of the Tamil militancy to boost their profits by such "topical", timely anthologies! Publishing industry, academic or otherwise, individual or institutional, is not shy of thriving on topics of human misery and destruction like the Sri Lankan crisis. To really represent the Tamil literary scene is then very difficult for the western publishing industry, given its moorings and dependence on the market economy.

Editing and publishing anthologies then is a political act. It involves making ideologically motivated decisions (perhaps unconsciously) on what to include and what to leave out. What eventually gets included goes to posterity (and the current reading public) as the authoritative.

record of the literary achievement of the community of that time, in the process defining the community's literary tradition and canonizing the works published. So leaving out the nationalistic writing or even further, the writing of Tamil militants, defines the contemporary Tamil literary tradition in a selective manner. Perhaps such literature will be ruled out as "popular", "politicized" or "mass," distinct from the "serious" which constitutes the tradition. Such distinctions again are ideological and serve to reify the biases of dominant socio-political groups and institutions. It is not far fetched then to view anthologies and collections as one way in which the Western socio-political institutions hegemonize the culture, literary traditions, and institutions of other communities. They define or "standardize" literary and cultural products according to their "tastes" (which Bourdieu would remind us, is another ideological construct). Someone more proficient has to do a similar review of the Sinhala section to find out what it accomplishes.

In this regard, we should not fail to observe the hegemony of the Western politico-industrial complex (including the publishing industry) through the English language. In presenting Tamil poetry to the world through English language and its characteristic discourse, we are again subjecting Tamil texts to ideological modification and even reinterpretation. This is of course a necessary evil. It is important to translate indigenous literature in English in order to provide it international attention; but in the process of translating we also "distort" this literature. The fact is that the Tamil originals are more passionate, poignant and direct in communicating their political theories. The valorization of feelings, subjectivity and concreteness deriving from the oral roots of the Tamil language provide it a force and spontaneity that is lacking in the English translation which follows a literate discourse that is cerebral, impersonal, and abstract. In making the Tamil texts to accommodate the restraint, balance and complexity preferred by English literary discourse (through features such as irony, paradox and ambiguity, valorized by Western critical theories, whether New Criticism or Deconstruction) the translators are forced to significantly alter the experiences and aesthetic effects communicated in Tamil. This especially affects committed political writing where feelings like indignation against the oppressor, hope of the transformed social order, unambiguous condemnation of oppressive forces, and the concrete identification of good and evil can be distorted in the name of balance or restraint. We would expect an editor of local literature translated into English to mediate for the wider reading public the discourse of the original. He owes an

apology to the Tamil writers by acknowledging or explaining these discursive alterations in the editorial introduction or at least the footnotes. Unfortunately, this can be done only by one proficient in Tamil.

There are lessons for all of us through this pioneering attempt. For Tamil scholars the challenge is to do more and better translations in English. It is evident that both the Sinhala and Tamil works in the collection are dated while the English selections are quite recent. Understandably, the lack of adequate translations will limit the editor's choice. On the other hand, editors of anthologies and collections should also understand the seriousness of their work and do justice to the native literary traditions by wisely negotiating the slippery ideological and politico-economic factors that impinge on their enterprise. Sri Lanka's international popularity (or notoriety) has given way to a spate of anthologies on our literature. However, local scholars more given to the "publish or perish" culture of western academy seem to consider editing such collections as a feather in their cap rather than a serious political activity by which they could do disservice to the indigenous cultures and literatures, adding to the cruel fate ..... our literature has suffered". Although Prof. Goonetilleka proudly declares that "having been inhibited, even suffocated, for four-hundred-and-fifty years under the colonial domination of the Portuguese, the Dutch and, finally, the British, (writers) have, after independence (1948), rapidly brought about about an 'efflorescence' (p.ix), he will be surprised to find that similar sources of domination still exert their hegemony through more subtle channels to continue to inhibit and suffocate our writers.

DR. A. SURESH CANAGARAJAH

LAMENT FOR A RUDELY PLUCKED SUNFLOWER

Look at this stalk  
 That grieves inconsolably  
 Over the heart  
 Torn from it.  
 Have you looked?  
 If you have eyes, look.

Who wrenched it away?  
 Only a devil's hand  
 Will stretch out  
 To rudely pluck  
 A heart-flower  
 That quickens  
 With the sun, its beauteous ideal

Behold that plucked heart  
 Beating within myself  
 That's split and sundered  
 Like torn-up water-lilies.

You do not know  
 The tremulousness  
 Of the stalk  
 Steeped in its memories  
 Of the flower  
 That's been plucked

Till I gather up  
 The scattered fragments  
 Of my self  
 And let it twine, creeper-like  
 Round my kith and kin  
 My hands too  
 Will be pricked  
 By thorns.



Keep your distance!  
 Take your hand away,  
 You devil  
 Long-nailed to pluck and tear!  
 Why oh why did you trespass  
 Into the zone

Where our life linked lies?  
 Why did you sunder  
 Our umbilical cord's lotus  
 Through which streams  
 The blood of our forebears?

You miserable wretch  
 Who trampled on  
 The strangled children  
 Whose mouths had blossomed  
 Into sweet smiles!  
 You who are congenitally deaf  
 To the soft cries  
 Of suckling babes  
 Avaunt!

Keep away, you iron fisted  
 Who have torn out  
 The heart of my village  
 Fresh as the dawn.

Get away, far away  
 From the boundaries  
 Of our life-zones.

Not for devils  
 Are our flower-parks  
 Not for uprooting  
 Are our life-blossoms.

Let each eye-bud open  
 In its own course  
 Do not pluck  
 The petals full of honey

Keep your distance!  
Take your hand away,  
You devil!

(14)

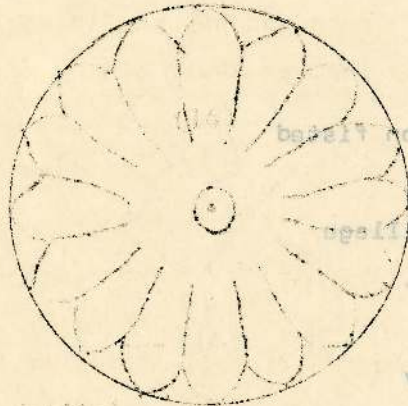
Long-nailed to pluck and tear!  
Why oh why did you trespass  
Into the zone

Avant, you devils!  
That the deep-rooted trees  
In our groves  
May break into flower.

Where our life linked lives?  
Why did you snub  
Our medicinal herb's focus  
Through which streams  
The blood of our forebears?

S. Vilvaratnam  
15/2/92

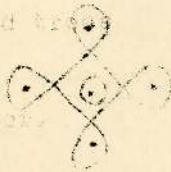
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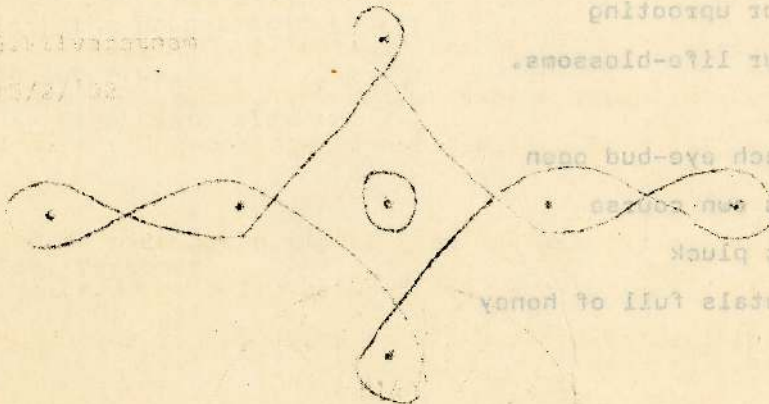
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In our groves  
May break into flower.

Get away, far away  
From the boundaries  
Of our life-line!



Not for devils  
Are our flower-parks  
Not for uprooting  
Are our life-blossoms.



Let each eye-bud open  
In its window  
Do not pluck  
The petals full of honey

POETRY READING: SOME IMPRESSIONS

Poetry reading is an ancient but forgotten art and it was a pleasant surprise to listen to a rendering of "Third World Poetry" by students of English, Drama and Theatre of the University of Jaffna, on 12th July 1991.

The poems were drawn from South Africa, Sri Lanka, India, Malaysia and the Caribbean. Their range was as diverse as the poets themselves- each unique in its own way. There was humour, anger, satire, suffering, endurance, compassion, and even hilariousness in the selection.

Great care seems to have gone into the selection not only for their suitability for oral rendering but also to reflect the problems facing the "Third World Countries" and perhaps as fit subjects for the discussion that was to follow.

The performance itself was laudable considering the fact that English is a second language to our undergraduates and this was pioneering work. However, the writer had the feeling that the poems did not carry through to the audience. It did not grip them, move them. Perhaps, the readers/performers had not sufficiently immersed themselves in the poems to articulate them as their own.

Members of the audience, too, could not respond adequately. Audience response is vital for any performance. Perhaps it was a new experience to them as well to listen without a script!

Two pieces, however, came off well- "African Prometheus" and Goodbye Party for Miss Pushpha"- the former because it was dramatized and the latter because the language was closer to the spoken idiom of our people. There certainly was rapport between reader/performer and the audience.

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The reading was followed by a panel discussion chaired by Dr.Suresh Canagarajah, Head of the Department of English. The other members of the panel were Messrs Lalith Ravindran, (University of Jaffna) S.Pathmanathan (Teachers College) and S.Rajasingam (Technical College).

The discussion started off on a lively note, with an introductory note by Mr.Lalith Ravindran and it took sometime to establish that there was a subtle difference between 'Third World Poetry and "Commonwealth" poetry,

Only two poems were taken into serious consideration African Prometheus" and the Animal and Insect Act, 1904". Doubts were raised as to the latter being poetry at all. At this point Mr.S.Pathmanathan intervened and spelt out what poetry is and its functions.

Some comments of a very general nature was made on African poetry but no particular poem was taken for discussion.

At this stage Mr.Lalith Ravindran wanted to know if there was no literature other than 'protest' literature. Obviously, he had the selections in mind. Upto a point most of the poems were 'protest' poems and rightly so as the poets were really giving vent to their anger at the cruelty of their erstwhile colonial masters. But there were other pieces like "The Night of the Scorpion" and "Goodbye Party to Miss Pushpha" that were not 'protest' literature,

The discussion could have been more fruitful if each panel member had taken a set of poems and examined them in detail.

Nevertheless as observed earlier, this was a pioneering piece of work and yet was successful in a way-it focussed on key issues facing the would-be reader-performer of poetry.

All in all, it was a new experience to all concerned and the writer hopes that more programmes of this nature would follow in the days to come.

S.RAJASINGHAM

EXPERIMENT AND CONTROVERSY IN THE JAFFNA ENGLISH THEATRE

The English theatre scene has taken an experimental turn in Jaffna in the past couple of years. A series of plays staged here (James Thurber's 'Ostrich' and Jamal Bonoura's 'The Accused' staged on 30th August 1991, Abjit Sircar's 'Child's Play' staged on 19th July 1991 and 30th August 1991, Bernard B. Dardee's 'The Village' staged on 02nd and 15th February 1992 and on 10th June 1993, Alagu Subramaniam's short story "Professional Mourners" adapted by Mr. A. J. Canagaratna's "Wake up my beloved" staged on February 1993 and on 10th June 1993,) have been quite controversial in their reception. We produce below some excerpts from the comments by reviewers in meetings of the English Forum on some of the plays. But to contextualize their comments, we first need an overview of the traditional English theatrical productions in Jaffna.

Although Tamil theatre is highly developed and seasoned and frequent in Jaffna, English plays are staged only occasionally. We have only a handful of producers, who are now quite ageing, belonging to the earlier generation and predominately English educated. Most of the plays chosen for production are classics, usually scenes from Shakespeare. Plays in translation are not preferred because English drama is primarily considered to be means of teaching language. Perhaps for the same reason, much effort is taken on getting the students to enunciate their "lines" correctly. The standard British English pronunciation is aimed at (sometimes even in Russian translations or American plays). Due to the emphasis on the lines, there is very little movement or use of the stage. The actors pose as if they are making a speech out of the dialogue. The concept of theatre then has been very weak in these plays. Sometimes, to make up for action, producers bank on spectacle. Much resources and time are spent on producing scenery and costumes that would reflect the authentic British (or western) atmosphere and environment.

The plays staged recently (mentioned above) have been different to this tradition in many ways. First of all, the selection of third world plays has been sensational. Not only is their English usually the "non-native varieties" spoken in India or Africa; their themes too are radically non-Western. In fact, many of the plays like "The Village" critique the English colonial rule in its own language. The themes are more homely and relevant to the immediate experiences of the audience, compared to the classical plays. The actors in these plays aim only at a "natural" educated Sri Lankan English. Usually the whole question

of language fails to receive inordinately Special attention as the focus on "theatre" has de-emphasized the privileged place of "lines". The stage is used to the maximum. The body, space, and choreographed movement are now speaking to the audience in place of the "lines". The costumes in most cases are nothing special: In 'Child's Play' the usual casual dress of local students was used; In 'Village' the actors were mostly bare bodied with a folded sarong below. Even the music is nativized. The local musical instruments like the mirudangam and tabla provide an appropriate atmosphere for these plays. Even in gestures and behaviour, the actors make an effort to be "natural", abandoning the assumption that they have to behave artificially in order to qualify as an "English" play.

Though all this is repulsive for many brought up in the classical tradition, most of the school students and university producers involved are fortunately influenced by the vibrant Tamil theatrical tradition. The Tamil theatre is also primarily a school level or educational theatre. The younger generation is then now able to connect the Tamil and English theatrical traditions. It is true that hitherto the Tamil theatre borrowed Ibsen, Chekov, Brecht and Beckett through English. But now the tables are turned: the English theatre is borrowing local themes, indigenous music, acting and directorial skills from the Tamil tradition, promising interesting new departures for the Jaffna English theatrical scene.

SURESH

THE THREE ONE ACT PLAYS- PRESENTED BY THE ENGLISH FORUM.UNIVERSITY OF JAFFNA, 30TH AUGUST 1991- KAILASAPATHY AUDITORIUM.SOME OBSERVATIONS.

In Drama, the Actor is the central object of attention. It is through the Actor the Author unfolds his theme and builds up the plot. It is through the Actor, the Director interprets the play and it is through the Actor the Audience understands and appreciates the Author and the Director, and enjoy the Theatre.

You can think of a Drama without a script or even without a plot. You can think of a Drama without sets, make-up, elaborate costumes, effective lighting, mood creating music and so on, but you can't think of a Drama without Actors. Therefore in any type of Drama- be it Classical, Realistic, Surrealistic, Epic or even in Modern Dramas where the role of the Director is exaggerated, the Actor plays a predominant role in the exposition, development and communication of the basic contradiction. Therefore understanding the "Art of the Actor" is a basic essential in any type of Theatre.

When I say the Art of the Actor, I mean the process by which the Actor uses his apparatus and other accessories to communicate artistically the thoughts, feelings and emotions of the character he is portraying to the audience. The apparatus available to the Actor is his body which is made up of the limbs, the face, his voice and the five senses. Through these, sensations and experiences are gained and stored as memories. These we call the external or physical apparatus; and the other, the mind or the soul of the Actor, where the emotions are stored as memories and is called the internal apparatus.

The Actor uses these memories to create the character he is portraying. A combination or a fusion of the internal feeling or emotion and the external manifestations induced as a result of the emotion created is what we call characterisation. An Actor doesn't create new souls for each of the characters he is called upon to portray. He brings out the emotion analogous to that of the character he is portraying by placing himself in similar circumstances from his own personal emotion memories and sensation memories. When such emotions are brought out and through them the physical apparatus of the Actor is made to function automatically and artistically, the resulting acting is termed as truthful Acting. It is a difficult process no doubt. But constant training will enable the Actor to attain this creation state. When the acting is truthful,

it has the power to attract, concentrate, sustain the interest and move the audience and eventually give them the satisfaction and enjoyment. In other words the Drama attains the objectives of communication artistically through the actors art and his accessories.

With this small note on acting, which has relevance to the observations I shall make, let me come to the three plays that were performed the other day. My chief concern that day was with perceiving each of the performances as an organic whole with special emphasis on Acting. Unfortunately the auxiliary instruments—as a well planned sets and props, lighting, music and costumes were restricted. That is quite understandable with a limited budget. But such restrictions place an additional burden and responsibility on the actors and they have to gather all their means to motivate, sustain and intensify the interest of the audience. This requires a concerted effort on the part of all the actors. On this aspect, I should say, the actors succeeded partially.

The three plays mostly depended on the dialogue for their exposition and communication. The Child's Play combined improvised acting with dialogue. The Ostrich used rhythmical movements and the Accused mostly used gestures, movements and mannerisms with dialogue. In all the three plays, the characterisation aspect that I have been talking about, appeared here and there, as flashes but not as a continuous process of creation. I felt that the difficulty in getting into the character was partly due to the misplaced emphasis on gestures and movements.

The actors appeared to be concentrating more on the form of delivery, intonations, pronunciations and modulation of the spoken words than on the meanings, thoughts and feelings they provoke. My primary concern here is the Accused, which was produced and acted by experienced actors.

Stanislavsky, the Master of the 'System' says, 'that of the many sources of stimulation for the creation of a role, the most powerful lies in the text of the play. The text provides the actor the necessary material for thought and emotion. It also provides the necessary circumstances to the actor to place himself in them to sense the feelings of the character. The more thoroughly the actor understands the text, the easier it becomes to feel and to express the feeling.

Take for instance the part played by Suresh. The command, control and the understanding of the nuances of the language gave him the ease for



his movements and show of emotion without undue-effort. When the horror of the accident was fully grasped internally, the emotion manifested itself in him through facial expression and movements of the limbs. The others were only reporting the accident, they were not acting or feeling the horror. This did have its effect on the final episode of the death of the Major. If the horror would have been properly built up by all the assistants into a make believe accident with its ghastly features, the shock the Major receives on seeing the accused in person would have been heightened to the extent that it justifies his death. The final episode however turned out to be melo-dramatic.

Another aspect I have to note in the production of the Accused which toned down the tempo of the play is the change of 'Sex'. In the script the accused is portrayed as a male character. Here the accused was transformed into a female character. Consequently the attitude of the major towards the accused was toned down, subdued and restricted. Had it been a male, the acting would become more challenging to the Major. The adamance, stubbornness and the demands of the accused would stir up more responses internally and externally and their interrelationship would have been more defined, throwing the major into fits of anger and depression, which in turn would have accelerated and justified the process of his death.

Of course there is nothing wrong in the change. If it is done, I feel that the conflict has to be heightened to 'justify the death. Unfortunately the accused was more feminine than a revolt and a threat to the state.

In all the three plays Communion, the interplay of giving and receiving from the other actors was not sufficient. Acting tended to be individualistic, thereby, the effect of an organic whole, an enactment where all participate, feel and react tended to be lost.

In the Child's Play, the actors found it difficult to concentrate on what they were doing on the stage. Their eyes wandered through the auditorium fearing to meet the eyes of the audience. These aspects are frequent in the early stages of acting. Confidence will build up through practice and training. More maturity was observed in the Accused. Yet there was difficulty in getting into the role with the exception of Suresh. They all tried and succeeded at times and that gives rays of hope.

On the whole it was an enjoyable evening with worthwhile activities on the stage. I thank the English Forum for that.

The well known novelist and linguist Anthony Burgess in his Language for you observes that the Indians specially in the South, impose their own pace, rhythm and intonation on English speech, that it gets distorted beyond recognition. The observation applies equally well to an 'infinite variety' of the language as spoken all throughout the world. I was naturally reminded of this fact when I had the opportunity to watch a team of young students from Hindu Ladies College, Jaffna perform the playlet Child's Play recently at the Ramanathan Hall, University of Jaffna.

It is not the end-effect of the imposition of the Sri Lankan Tamil students' intonation upon a variety of English idiom and expression which sprang out of a North Indian College life situation that I am particularly interested in, at the moment. Such considerations are merely incidental and perhaps secondary. I would rather like to question the purpose and place of English plays in our midst.

One of the purposes could be teaching English Language to our children. Plays serve as teaching aids in a very effective, practical and valid sense. May be, it is in this capacity that this very play-Child's Play by Abijit Sircar-came to be chosen for performance by our group of young children. And, may be, the dearth or a complete lack of scripts dealing with situations nearer home is another reason for the choice. Well, the choice is good enough. It deals with a 'burning problem' as they call it. The mock rehearsal for a bank robbery by college (University?) students is only a 'Child's Play' in more than one sense. The very last bit of action in which the disgruntled boys seem to turn seriously against their colleague who manages to secure a job through nepotism injects a powerful irony into the whole mockery which the play is. In this respect the title turns out to be very vital, integral part of the entire-piece.

The performance was more than satisfying and thanks to our local expertise in modern modes of play production, we are adequately equipped, technique-wise, to handle Abijit Sircar's script with graceful ease. But one is left wondering whether our children, the players themselves inclusive, have the opportunity to develop their sensibilities well enough for a full grasp and appreciation of all the artistic nuances embodied.

ARE MY COCONUT TREES STILL STANDING OR ...?

It goes without saying that such a grasp and appreciation are essential pre-requisites for effective communication and infection of feeling. And should not our English plays be more than mere teaching aids?

In this context, one is tempted to look back, not in anger, but in nostalgia to those happy old days when Jaffna could take in successful doses of Waiting for Godot produced years before the now celebrated author was heard of even by a tiny microscopic minority of scholars and critics.

R. MURUGAIYAN

Shattered and charred thorn?

Does the moon

Peep out and weep?

Does my wind

Under its burden of

Having food my heart

And uprooted

Have come here.

I say emphatically

For on this calm

On this still

And the wind

For the sake of

For the sake of

For the sake of

For the sake of

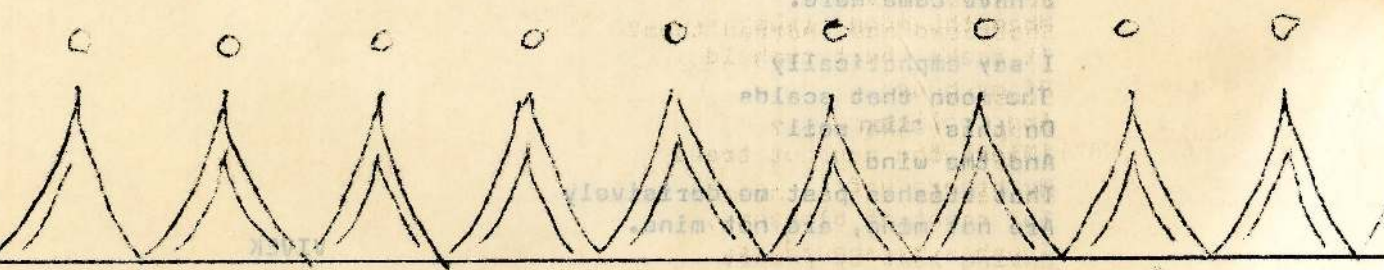
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For the sake of



Translated by A.J. Conzgarins

ARE MY COCONUT TREES STILL STANDING OR ...?

In the compound of my house  
 Seven or eight coconut trees  
 Stand upright  
 Scraping the sky

In the nights  
 When the moon rises  
 It seeks the threshold  
 Of my house  
 And frolics  
 'Midst the coconut trees  
 My breeze wafts  
 The scent of blossoms,  
 Touches my shoulders,  
 Caresses my face  
 And talks to me.

All these I lost  
 One day when  
 The enemy's forces  
 Surrounded my territory  
 Grief  
 Was all that remained

My fields where  
 Storks blossomed  
 And the boughs of my trees  
 Where birds bloomed  
 Are now mounds of ash  
 Mingled with the sand

This time, tonight  
 Are my coconut trees  
 Still standing  
 Or have shells  
 Shattered and charred them?

Does the moon  
 Peep out and weep?  
 Does my wind  
 Wander in search of me?

Having lost my /heart  
 And uprooted  
 I have come here.

I say emphatically  
 The moon that scalds  
 On this alien soil  
 And the wind  
 That brushes past me derisively  
 Are not mine, are not mine.

VIVEK

Translated by A.J.Canagaratna

Why are your eyes reddened?  
Sit by me.  
Come!

(25)

FRUIT

Waiting to pluck fruit  
Pluck my fruit  
The fruit of my life

I know  
But it's the means I lack  
My path closed  
My ground devastated,  
And my moonlit compound frozen  
In fear caused by the dogs' howling  
The body of my shadow too  
Is filled with dead trees and hot.

Time is passing  
My body is ageing  
Although from frenzy panting  
My mind alone  
Throbbing, perspiring, rust discarding  
Shines with undimmed youthfulness:  
With youthfulness  
I will come  
Appeasing my hunger  
And rest awhile

Waiting to pluck fruit  
Pluck my fruit  
The fruit of my life

- A poem by Vasudevan (S. Lawrence)  
- Translated from Tamil into English by  
Kandiah Sh

COMMUNION

Come;  
Sit by me.  
Why are your eyes reddened?

Of course, sleeplessness ...  
and looking weary .....

restless wandering...?  
**Fear not,**  
let's comfort  
one another.

Shall we stroll outside a bit  
to pacify our legs?

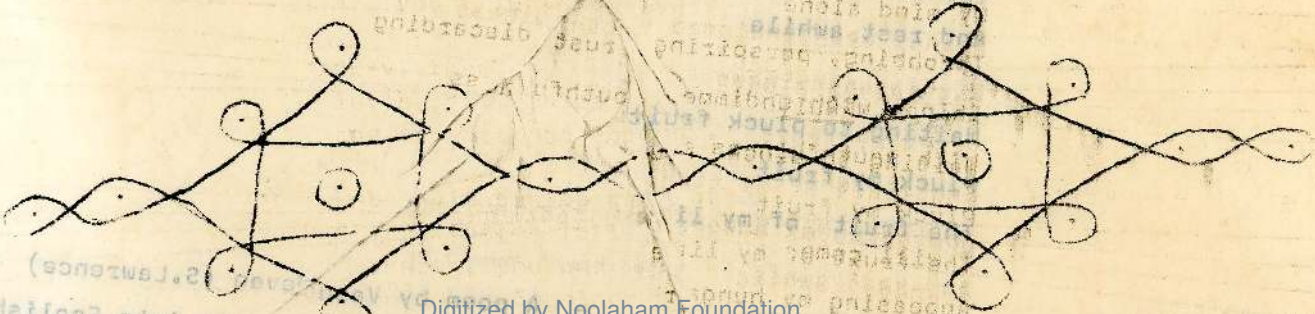
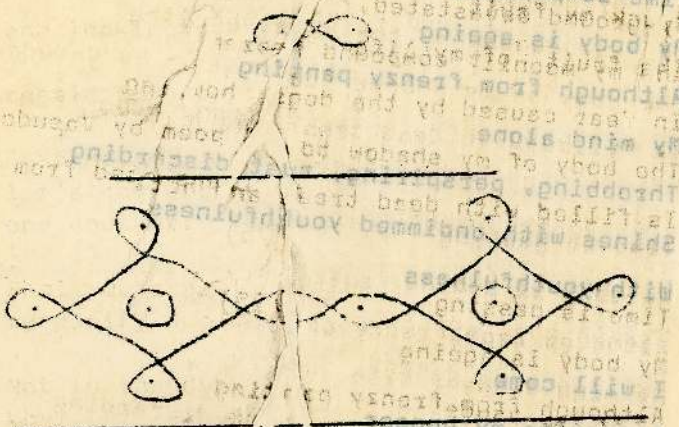
Not in the dark?  
Why?

Are you frightened too?!

Okay, then,  
let's sit beside each other,  
and comfort one another.

Let's sit beside each other,  
Death! <sup>All</sup> that's left are  
darkness, you and me.  
Come let's together ravis  
the darkness.

S. JAYASHANKAR  
Translated by Suresh



EXILED DAYS

Good Friday  
The Day they crucified you.

A hot wind  
blew between shore and sea.  
One or two sea crows  
flew in the immaculate sky.  
The wind grating <sup>the</sup> palmyrah trees  
whipped up inexpressible horror  
That was the last day in our village.  
We came ashore  
only the waves returned.  
When the sun fell into the sea  
we knelt down and wept.  
An eerie howl rose  
became night  
In the distance  
like <sup>a</sup> single corpse in the cemetery  
burnt out village.

Good Friday  
The day they crucified you.

P. AKILAN

Translated by A. Suresh Canagarajah

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

- P.Akilan - 1st year student, University of Jaffna
- Dr.A.S.Canagarajah - Senior Lecturer and Head, ELTC,  
University of Jaffna.
- A.J.Canagaratna - Visiting Lecturer in English, ELTC,  
University of Jaffna.
- S.Jeyashankar - Temporary Assistant Lecturer, Fine Arts.
- S.Luckshmi - Teacher, Chundikuli Girls' College
- R.Murugaiyan - Senior Assistant Registrar, Examinations,  
University of Jaffna.
- S.Pathmanathan - Vice Principal, Teachers Training College,  
Palaly.
- S.Rajasingham - Rtd.Lecturer, Kokuvil Technical College.
- K.Shriganeshan - College Lecturer NPAUC, Vavuniya.
- S.P.Sivanesh - Young writer
- H.Sunderalingam - Divisional Education Officer, Vellore
- Vamadevan (S.Lawrance) - Young Poet
- S.Vilvaratnam - Poet
- Vivek - Young poet.



The English Forum of the University of Jaffna has consciously chosen to christen its bulletin the 'Third Eye'.

We are not unaware of the trepidation the bulletin's name might cause in the minds of those who are familiar with the legend associated with Lord Siva's opening of His third eye to intimidate Makeerar who had dared to criticise his poem.

While we hope to publish critical pieces which while being critical, will display a sense of responsibility, we can assure our readers and would-be contributors that we do not aim to scorch their creativity till it shrivels up completely.

We have chosen this name mainly because we wish to make it clear that we hope to link our venture to our indigenous traditions and our local languages. Otherwise a bulletin published in English today runs the risk of appearing a hot-house product.

A periodical published here and now cannot but be sensitive to and reflect what's going on in the society at large.

The alert reader will notice that quite a number of pieces in this maiden issue take for theme the plight of the refugees, the displaced and the uprooted. This is as it should be, given what is happening around us.

Another noteworthy feature is that this issue carries several translations from Tamil, especially of works by young writers.

What, some carping critic might ask, is an English periodical doing with translations from Tamil?

The answer is simple. In our country, even when English was the medium of instruction, the sad fact is that there was hardly any creative writing in English worth talking about.

While Third Eye welcomes original contributions in English especially creative writing it envisages a fruitful dialogue with creative writing in local languages because this, we are convinced, will be mutually beneficial.

We welcome feedback from would-be Makeerars and assure them Third Eye will not incinerate them.

THIRD EYE

Advisory Board:- A.S.Canagarajah

A.J.Canagaratna

Editorial Board:- S.Jeyasankar

N.V.Rajapillai

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"Have these people no other work?" my wife complained. "They come into houses uninvited. They have no respect for women folk nowadays"

"They have their jobs to do," I protested. "Anyway, he won't come again"

"I hear they are kidnapping children into Hyderabad," she went on chattering

"We have no children," I said absentmindedly.

My wife looked at me curiously. Perhaps she thought I was daft. She proceeded to lay out my meal. I proceeded to gobble my food. I am used to that too. Then with an "I shall be late. Keep the door open," I walked out. She knew, of course, that I was going to the cinema. She never grudged me the four and three-quarter annas. Force of habit. If you persist in a habit, wives of course get worried if you don't keep on persisting.

Luckily for me, there were only two persons in the gallery, so I could stretch my limbs comfortably on the seat opposite. The hall was darkened and soon I was listening to the voice of Mr. Berkely Hill. I sat up and took notice when he began: "The biggest census in the world" Mr. Hill led the audience around the busy streets of Bombay, Calcutta, and Madras.

"When the census man comes to your door..." Purred Mr. Hill, "... whether you are a city worker or a day labourer, or drive a bullock cart..." Well, I didn't drive a bullock cart and I had already faced the census man. There had been nothing exciting about it. I lost all interest in the census and fell into a snooze.

When I woke up, my legs were touching the ground. Someone had shifted my feet off the front seat. There were whispers. The screen was a blaze of colour. Somewhere in Mexico... Aztec civilisation ... Fitzpatrick...snooze.

When I woke up again, I heard someone say: "Now he will die." I sat up with a start to watch an action-packed drama (a manhunt in the Wild West) drawing to a close.

"Come out before I blow your brains out" shouts the hero.

"Come and get me," says the villain. Bang! and the barn door opens, and the villain lies dead, shot through the heart. A horse rears off and leaves the saddle behind... I make for the exit.

**O**UTSIDE, it is a beautiful night. There are on lights in the street. The moon comes up out of a medley of wool and lights up my alley. I light a beedi and, like a tightrope walker, tip-toe gingerly over the sleeping bodies of men, women, and children. For many years now, I have walked through this alley. It is in the heart of the town, and yet so removed and hedged between the rows of inscrutable doorways that the stranger might spend many weary hours looking for a number. The postman is, of course, a wonder. He knows the names of the occupants by rote. The women are his friends. They hardly talk to any other male when their husbands are not at home. But the postman is permitted to be familiar.

On a pitch-dark night, when there is only one street lamp, my alley takes on an air of sadness. When it rains, the people who sleep out disappear, and from end to end, the long labyrinth of gutter and drain looks desolate. On a warm, starry night, or at best on a full moon day, with a gust of sea wind driving the dead leaves in a whirl, the huddle of flesh, lovers, old people, vermin, and rats are transformed into a phantasmagoria of souls in pain.

It is my peculiar pleasure to feast my eyes on this elemental orgy of passion, in a world dead to all life. The turn of a leg in sleep, the arms in the act of embrace, the waking wisper of a lover to his mate.

As usual, I come to the street tap that is turned on and left flowing by some careless person. I wash my legs, turn the tap off as an act of virtue and walk the tip-toe to my door, best I set my feet again before enter my room.

The door is ajar, and the light is burning inside. I become irritated. How often have warned my wife that she should bolt the door before falling asleep. I push the door open in a temper. Suppose it were some stranger entering as I am doing now? Late as it is, I

must wake her and pick a quarrel with her. The room is empty. The mats have been spread and the pillows laid. The little kerosene lamp is burning on a full wick. Yet she is not there. I have a sinking feeling. There is a footstep as she enters. I realise that there is some commotion next door, something afoot at that late hour of the night.

Suddenly my wife bursts into the room. "Oh, you are back," she says, peremptorily digging into an old box and pulling out a bundle of clean rags.

"That will do," she says. "the midwife will be here any minute"

"Here? Where?"

"Next door," she says impatiently. "Janaki is in pains."

"Janaki? Is she the one with varicose veins?" My wife gives me a withering look.

"I have no time to be explaining to you," she shouts, and makes her exit. Evidently Janaki must be the squint-eyed creature with green, bulging veins knotted at the joint of her knees.

"How funny," I say to myself "Only this morning she was doing her chores. Now she is groaning." Only a thin partition divides Janaki's apartment from ours. The men of the family must have left the women to fend for themselves. I hear my wife's voice amongst the others. Women want men, but in their moment of physical suffering they want to be left alone.

"Ram—Ramchandra—O—Rama——"  
her groans fall on my soul like a knife. I am like one drugged, unable to move. I roll listlessly on the bare mat on the floor. There is a hush, but not for long. Again the groans start, "Ram—Ram—Ram." My wife comes back.

It will be any minute now she says "The midwife has taken charge."

Across the thin wedge of the box-wood wall, not a yard away, the hushed groan of a woman in pain at grips with death, and a child fighting for breath, creates anew the sense of oppression and awe. A terrible hush, and there is a blind cry of pain and the sudden wail of a child.

It is born, I think. It has chosen this dark alley these meagre surroundings. Between evening and midnight, a man child has crept into the home next door. It seems long ago that the census man was in my room. I can hear the slow tick-tick of the Queen Anne watch on the wall. It seems a sort of nightmare, the people sleeping in the alley, the faint rustle of the wind in the gutter, the uncanny stillness next door. I am bathed in perspiration.

There is someone else in the room. She is sleeping one foot of cold floor dividing our mats. I put out my hand. She rolls over and we are locked in one embrace.

★ ★

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**T**HIRD EYE takes pride in reprinting T. Ramanathan's "The Biggest Census In the world," the short story which won the prize of £ 100 offered by the magazine Encounter for a short story competition it conducted in 1967 for entries from Asia and Africa. The judges were Stephen (h) Spender John Morris and Edmund Blunden.

Mr. Ramanathan, who passed away recently who was a journalist on the editorial staff of the Times of Ceylon at the time he submitted this prize winning entry, Unfortunately his other works, among which was a novel on Ceylon have not seen the light of print.

Editors