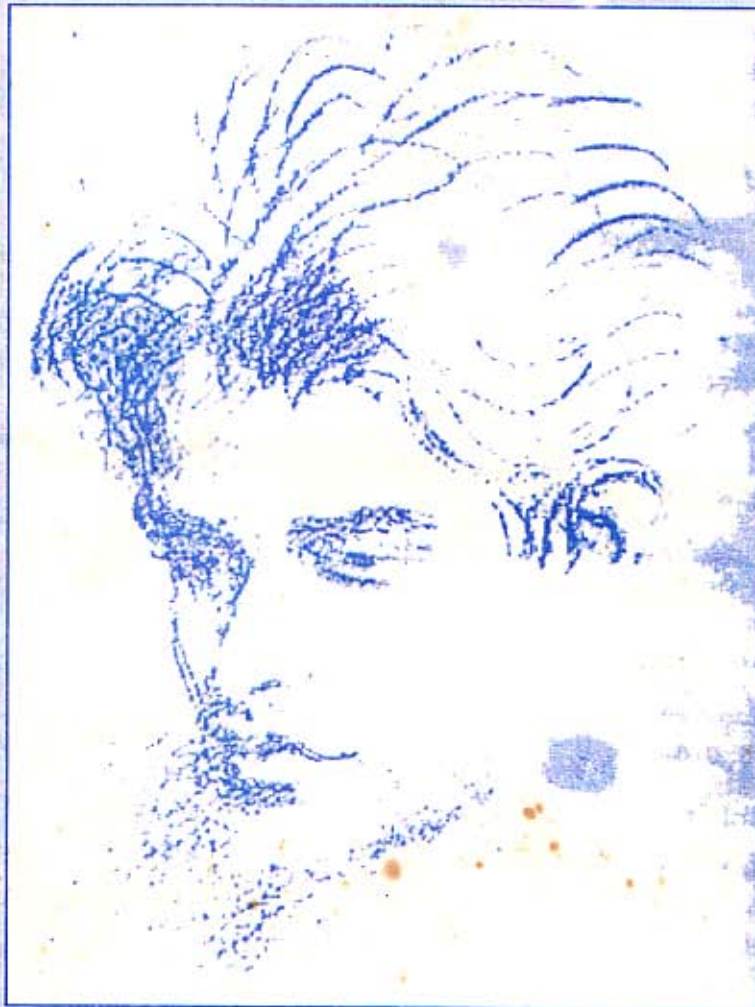




THIRD EYE

POET THAMBIMUTTU



From a drawing by Augustus John.

**PUBLICATION OF THE
'ENGLISH FORUM'**

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The 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' is Sanskrit meaning 'to burn'. This has a dual role. Turned inwards the burning is an internal process of cleansing Samskara or purification. The five door of perception are under the perfect control of the mind (manas) to such a cleanser. His inner faculty of thought is the best fields for the cultivation of true literary crop. Such products can stand timelessly.

TRUE PEACE LOVERS

The call for ballot, the jugglers resort
to white wash stately sepulchre
and spin the ubiquitous relief
for a cause that seems just
n'er in spirit,
to fill the bill, to whet
the war zizmo - some forelone
mendicants do liege, in loyalty sit
like Larzarus, waiting, to catch the crumbs
that might be let fall,
and in rivalry struggle to hold
a rank first among the rest.
and succour the "upright - peace - lovers"
dreams; desing'd and will'd.

The Race's destiny lies in tatters
driven, as the desert dwellers,
from pillar to post,
uprooted from ancestral resi,
scattered in the name of "war for peace"
and "struggle for freedom".
a monstrous parody-
The "peace lovers" do beat
the drums of Human Rights, in form,
commission and legal code, bless'd sagely
on its own valued scale
by the sanctimonious eagle
the champion of Human Rights.
It skips reason to equate
Human Rights with power politics-
that regards not the losses nor suffering
nor feeling,
but flash joyfully mirror'd neon lights
a conceit of legal terror; the voting thamasha-

The homeless do roam the wilderness
devoid of all things valued,
weather'd in the winter's cold
of thunder and shower, and
the parching heat of merciless
summer,
But nature's changing moods farless harsh
than the backstage horrors of stately
terror,
gracefully screened, flashing lights.

They chime the bells of democracy,
to muffle the cry of agony,
and go dancing on the streets
ballyhooing devaluation promises
gas balon'd, ever distanced
true peace lovers.

Votes sort after with nor voter in sight
certain of victory with puppets in hand.
No one dare ask why,
the mendicants do sit close - by
nodding heads,
and warming in comfort in the fire
that consumes the destiny of their fire
that consumes the destiny of their race.
So clever in deceptive tactics
well knowing any vote is a valid vote,
for the world to acknowledge.

- L.A.Leon

BEARING COALS OF FIRE

Ritual drums echoing all around,
Fire - brand in the " Marie Amman" ¹ temple
Luminescent, dark orange in colour.

Ritual drums echoing all around,
The " Thalai Theivam" ² of the Temple in a trance
Walks in a robotic style with a strange "ha"
Surrounded by the " Theivams" and devotees.

Treading towards the fire-beds,
Like a huge wave with magic power
All around us the ritual drum echoing.

The people surrounded behind a roped fence
Without food and sleep
Waiting for the moment through the night
All got chilled.

The " Thalai Theivam" now treads on the fire - bed
followed by hundreds and hundreds of my people
bearing coals of fire in their bosoms
and freezing sadness on their faces.

All around us is the ritual drum echoing
My heart chilled,
My eyes dropped tears
anyone can read their tragedies on their silent faces
Rather than from a censored and lie - flowing mass media
in this " age of information".

All round us is the ritual drum echoing
I feel,
A magical power runs through myself
I feel within me I'm(re) charged
Gradually night hides its darkness
The new rays of the morning
Springs from the "Eluvankarai" ³

- S.Jeyasankar.

1. Female Deity of rain

2. Chief Deity

3. A small part of Batticaloa where sun rises.

SUITE FOR KOKODICHOLAI, SRI LANKA

1. Testimony

After the mine the soldier came
Among those men they took was my husband
He with the others had to circle the crater three times
Then the soldiers forced them into the centre

The third one herded in was my husband
Where I stood I saw face as they shot him
I watched while they fired the shots that killed the others
The bodies lay one above the other like sticks of wood

I have seven children I know my husband's body
After the burning I did not know his body
After the burning I did not see his face again
This cloth is a piece of his sarong, partly burned.

2. Wealth

I was in my fields when I heard the first shots
I walked quickly The first houses were deserted
I could hear the soldiers ahead, firing
Then I met others also walking quickly

They took me with them to Kumaranayagam's mill
Beside the gate three red blossoms of hibiscus
The gate stood open Beyond I saw my wife
She stood in the yard as though she owned nothing

Inside a strip of light lay across the floor
A woman knelt dipping a cloth in a bucket
Again and again she washed the same stain
The stain began to gleam as though polished

My wife had laid the children side by side
She had placed the smallest between the other two
She had laid the boy between his two sisters
Often they walked that way, one on either side

After three days I went back to my fields
I looked at the ground Nothing will grow here
I was wrong Now the rice is green
Still there is no reason to walk quickly.

3. Character

My mother's full name was Mamangam Maheswary
We thought many together would be safe
When you're afraid a crowd seems good
I hoped in the mill I could hide my children

The soldiers' shouts sounded like a great force
My mother sat down in the centre of the room
The rest of us scurried like rats but she was clam
Her sari was red, the colour of heat

I pushed my children back behind the others
My mother's back was straight, spine of a queen
Like an old tree she had grown strong
I have seen men tremble and whine in her presence

But these soldiers were not men, and I am not worthy
Like a rat I hid beneath my dead children
My mother sat like a stone carving
Her full name was Mamangam Maheswary

4. Witness

In the compound the bodies were scattered
On the veranda they lay in heaps
Inside they lay where had fallen
I stood on a floor of blood

The bodies had not quite gone out
Light from their flesh made a last dusk in the room
Death was busy, and I was in its presence
Why was I chosen Who am I to be alive

Latter they came back and burned the bodies
Afterward ash swirled up on the wind, and away
Still, I see the arms fallen open as though to give
I see the arms reaching as though to embrace

Marlyn Krysl

From: Kenyan Review

FIRE WALK

Neems are sacred
Neems are dignified
Neems have the vigour to grow into huge trees
Have the grandeur that makes one's chest be held high
And greenness that fills the heart.

Such neems when cut down, piled and fire lit
Flamboyant tongues of fire blossomed and filled the fire-bed

Feet in thousands treated on the fire
To fulfil their long - waited vows
Conceived and harboured in minds
Food renounced and sleep neglected.

Trickling down, through the thousand' feet, into the fire - bed
The fire that flared in the heart's furnace
Extinguished and thus made cool and calm
The minds that held the vows.

The days of 'agni' long came to an end

Having walked the fire
What would the request be
At the sacred feet of 'Amman'?

Just to let the vow become
Past memories all
Like the pieces of coal
Buried beneath the sands
When such neems
Of vigour, grandeur and greenness
Are burnt down to earth

By: **S.Jeyasanker,**

Translated by: T.Kirupakaran.

MY WISHES....

Oh, Bat, may you live long
worldly path denied
you that make your own,
Such individuality,
oh, my guide, May you live long.

"You're in everything
upside down" thus,
my family when rebukes
Oh, a rare medication
may you live long.

Travellers, in Pretence Sacrificed
life, for law and order
and tradition to live,
celebrated daylight that
you repulsed,
May you live long.

Within dark nights incomprehensible
way, though instinct sort
By juicy fragrance drawn
never illusion'd by appearance
you in pristine relationship
Life prospered...
may you live long.

I, like you,
To the world's eyes
a creature, that hangs
upside down.

It's a crime indeed
To hold firm in truth
and stand erect - when
The world'd turned
upside down in lies.

Oh, Bat may you live long,
Oh, my ambition,
May you live long.

By: **Vasudevan**

Translated by: L.A.Leon

THE PRICK OF CONSCIENCE

Mr.K.is very methodical about his daily routine, though he leads a retired life.

He gets up at half past four, with the pealing of the Vairavar temple bells. He takes an hour for his ablutions and prayers. Then, before dawn breaks, he is at the farm attending to his cattle and crops. He returns in time for breakfast. After that he goes to the market. Marketing is an important affair to him almost a ritual. There he meets his friends and catches up with the latest news. It takes about an hour.

On his way home, he buys the day's newspaper. He folds it neatly and puts it inside the bag lest someone sees it and begs to have a glance at it. Mr.K.doesn't like loaning his paper before he had read it from the first page to the last.

As soon as he returns home, he takes out the paper, keeps it on his table and then proceeds to the kitchen to hand over the day's purchase to his wife. After that, there'll be other chores and so on. Then, he goes to the well for a refreshing bath. "Unless you bathe well, the heat in the system will create complications..." , he used to say.

He has his lunch at about half past one. After lunch, he goes to his easy - chair in the front verandah, shawl in one hand and news paper in the other. Dusting the chair with his shawl, he would ease himself into the easy - chair, calling the names of the Almighty. Adjusting the spectacles, he would open the news paper...

He likes the paper to be crisp with the smell of the printer's ink and newsprint. Mr.K. will read the paper in its entirety, leaving out not even a single line. After reading, he'll fold the paper neatly, place it beside him have a nap the next hour or so.

This habit formed an important part of his daily life. He enjoyed it and this gave him a sense of fulfilment. He thought of what he was reading, sometimes even while reading and later discussed the information he had gleaned with his friends...

During the last fortnight, the life - patterns of many people in the peninsula had changed. And in some

cases, some had even lost their lives.. However, Mr.K's life was not affected.

Today, too, Mr.K. had dusted the easy - chair and relaxed. Opening the paper, he felt the same uneasiness he had felt in the past few days.... The paper carried news of bombing and fighting everywhere... People were suffering and dying It was a terrible time. People from places like Trincomalee were fleeing in large numbers . They had walked all the way to Mullaitivu and come to Jaffna by the boat loads..

The news disgusted him. He cursed himself for lying in comfort and reading such news. It's a sin! A sin... Oh, God.... Mr.K. got up suddenly.

"Enna" Whatever has happened to you?.... asked his wife, who was seated in the chair next to him, slicing as arecanut.

"Something's pricking me!....", he managed to say.

-A.Santhan.

I gave my eyes to nature
Wonderful paintings blossomed.
I gave my ears to nature
It filled my heart with wonderful music
I gave my mind to nature
Wonderful poems came out into being.
I gave myself wholly to it
I became graceful, strengthened and
Began to excel as a wonderful human.

For my sake I went in search of nature
Forests got destroyed,
Brooks got dried up,
Mountains crumbled.
The sea and the wind too lost their nature
And the whole earth became polluted.

I existed
But as a sickening.

By: **S.Jeyasankar**
Translated by: T.Kirupakaran.

THE VISION

In the reflected light
That cleft and penetrated the sea
Trips and falls a bird
the shadows of the wings
Struggle to be reflected
On the trembling waves
Glowing furnace of sea
Centres in the heat
The fist slip away
As they slip and glide
The light piercing and bumping
Reflects through the scales

The sea swims in bliss
Lulled on the lap of the wind
The bird that fell in the sea
Holding on the flies again.

K. Karunakaran,
Translated by L.A. Leon.

THE VOID

As you opened the gate you could not but see the margosa tree that stood in the compound of our house.

True, there are margosa trees in everyone's compound. Some are not even conscious that there's a margosa in their compound. Yet others think it a bother: by shedding its leaves and fruits, it litters the compound. To us, our margosa was something special, almost a member of the family. One's relationships need not be confined only to humans, need they?

That margosa with its outspread boughs covered with soughing leaves seemed to caress us and

speak to us in an unfathomable languages.

Whenever we had some time to spare, our family used to relax in its shade. Whenever we shared our joys and even our sorrows, it seemed to participate, silently.

Our eldest daughter was the one most intimate with that margosa. Most of the time she was at home, she could be found seated in a chair or on the concrete slab in its shade, doing her homework or reading storybooks, with the radio switched on.

I too sought solace in the night under the margosa after wrestling the whole day with one problem after another: the gentle, caressing breeze soothed both my body and mind as I listened appreciatively to the margosa's symphony.

On holidays and off - days, what a relief to sit in its shade after lunch, having disposed of whatever work had to be done! What an experience to read a newspaper or a book in its cool shade! In between one could enjoy a snooze too. In a short while, some friends would gather: they had eyes only for the margosa and all their talk would circle round it: "How blessed you are to lie Under a margosa tree, book in hand; not everyone is so fortunate!" my friend Siva used to remark often, slightly enviously. There was no Margosa in his house nor even the Space to plant one.

I have another friend, with artistic interests. Naturally, he looked at everything with an artist's eye. His eye was always on our margosa which stood upright, its boughs beyond one's reach, with its canopy of leaves swaying in the wind. One morning he dropped in at home, after a drizzle. After gazing for a while at the margosa, he remarked "How beautiful that margosa-looks, like a pubescent girl after a bath." True, it was beautiful.

My wife was the one who had the most links with the margosa. In the daytime, the children would be out, either at school or tutorials. I left home in the morning and returned only in the evening. The margosa was the only refuge for my wife after she had finished her household chores. Someone had told her that the shade of the margosa and its breeze were good for a heart-patient like her.

Our kitchen was a small one, roofed with tin sheets: this and the heat of the fireplace combined to make our kitchen unbearably hot. During the hot season, it was hell. The moment the cooking was finished, she would serve the last daughter's lunch on a plate and hurry to the margosa. Only then life seemed to flow back into her.

"That moment was a very happy one for the last child too, engrossed as she was in watching the pair of twittering 'jack-seed' birds flying around the nest they had built on a branch and the golden sequinas of light on the fallen leaves, formed by the sun's rays streaming through the foliage.

When the season for the margosa tree to shed its leaves came, the compound had to be swept frequently as the fallen leaves littered the ground. Only then my wife used to get a little angry and irritated, as with a naughty child.

There weren't many trees in our compound. Our house was roofed with asbestos sheets and the ventilation was poor. Therefore, during the daytime - especially in the hot season-staying inside the house was impossible. Whenever one was at home, one couldn't relax because the heat and the stickiness of the body made one irritable. How one longed then for a tree-especially a margosa - in the compound! .

A firm decision was taken to somehow or other plant a margosa tree in the compound and tent it. Fortunately in the opposite compound there was a margosa sapling about which no one seemed to bother. When the ground was wet and loose after a shower, we uprooted it taking care not to damage the tap-root; as we were bringing it home, someone who was passing down the lane stopped and said something which is etched on our memory . "Thambi we won' t live as long as tree; man will not give as such as a tree either.... and that too a margosa.... one has to be blessed to enjoy the margosa and its shade plant it carefully, thambi."

It was a terrible shock to us too, as it was to everyone else. If one has to quit one's home - and that too so suddenly-who wouldn't be shocked?

When all the others had begun to move out, how could we refuse to budge? The frightening explosion of bombs could be heard close by. When, like all the others, we left the house that overcast evening, with heavy hearts, carrying whatever we could, all our gazes were riveted on the margosa.

In that windless dusk, the margosa stood motionless and mournful, as never before. It bid us farewell, silently.

It was just our good luck that, with the help of a friend, we were able to get a house to stay in - at a time when the uprooted and displaced had to seek refuge in the shade of trees or live in churches, temples and schools as best they could. The house was a fairly convenient one. The landlady too was very hospitable - a piece of good luck not enjoyed by everyone.

But there was one thing lacking - happiness. Exile from our house, our compound and the margosa in our compound filled us with a sense of alienation.

During the period of displacement, even the rains failed. A hot, burning sun beat down, as never before.

Though the house where we had found refuge was a convenient one, it was rather old. The ventilation was poor and the heat from the roof made things worse. Whether it was daytime or night, it was always stuffy. Even at night, the ground seemed to radiate heat. Then all our thoughts would go back to our margosa.

Our daughter used to remark frequently "If only we could sit under our margosa at times like this." Her words used to sadden us all. She was always like that, coming out with unseasonable views. "God alone knows whether our house has been blasted to bits by all these explosions we hear. Who knows whether our margosa is standing?"

However our mother's words soothed us all "Chee, chee, nothing will happen ... as long as Nallur Murugan is there, there's nothing to fear".

An undefinable emotion, blended of happiness, grief and fear, swayed us. Joy - that we were returning to our homes after six months; grief - at the loss of kith and kin and our belongings'. fear- of what lay in store for us.

But joy predominated: the happiness of being able to stretch ourselves out and relax in our homes.

On our way back strange faces, potholed-and-cratered streets, house and buildings in ruins, fallen trees-all testified to war's fury. "Would our house too have escaped?" this was the question uppermost in all our minds.

The very appearance of our street had changed: fallen trees, the debris of buildings, the road buried under the over growth

Apprehensively, we turned into the small lane leading to our house. What an enormous relief! Our house and the margosa had survived. Everyone was happy.

"Muruga" was all Ammamma could utter. Her eyes were moist.

The fence was in tatters. A mountain of litter had buried the compound. When we sat under the margosa after sweeping the compound, all the tribulation we had endured were forgotten and our minds felt at ease.

Though several branches had been severed, the margosa had put forth new ones which spread more shade than before.

The margosa's base appeared to be swollen. In one or two places, there were shellscars.

In front of the house there was a crater probably caused by a bomb or shell whose flying fragments had pockmarked the front wall of the house, here and there.

It was a rather dark dawn. In a short while it grew blacker and it began to rain cats and dogs. Normally no one expects such a heavy shower in May.

Along with the heavy rain, a twisting wind began to blow furiously as if it were venting its wrath on someone.

That day I didn't go out anywhere. In fact, I had curtailed my going out. I went out only if it was strictly necessary. The office too hadn't begun to function properly. Life seemed to have become cramped and confined. What could one do?

I spent the time watching the fury of the rain and the wind.

Though the rain had lessened a bit, it still remained dark and gloomy. But the fury of the wind hadn't abated one little bit.

It was when I was watching the trees swaying this way and that in the wind, that I heard the crackling sound ('nara, nara') before a tree snaps and falls.

When I listened intently I realised that the sounds were coming from the foot of the margosa. The snapping sounds became louder. All of us looked with grief filled eyes at the margosa.

The rain-drenched margosa stood swaying in the wind, unconscious of the impending end.

We looked at each other's faces. The death of the tree was imminent, its fate irreversible.

The wind subsided a bit only to blow even more furiously. 'Padeer': the sound struck our ears like a thunderbolt.

The uprooted margosa lay like an animal which had lain down on the ground unable to bear the weight of its body. The fallen tree filled all the space in the compound.

The wind too had fallen, as if its sole resolve was to uproot the margosa.

With a heavy heart, I went up to base of the tree, skirting the branches; my eyes were riveted to the place where it had snapped: a large metal fragment from a sheet had firmly lodged there-the herald of Yam, the Lord of Death.

The margosa had borne that sheet -fragment in the belly of its base all these days.

"Perhaps it was determined to stay alive till we came back".

Not only our compound, even our minds and hearts were left as empty as a void.

**I THOUGHT
YOU CALLED.....**

A yi yai yor! "Are you just watching Ambi playing sand?" Ambi was two when he put the socks meant for his foot on his hands and became lame.

Ayi yai yor! "Ambi's babbling something"

Ambi was four year, a snap with the fingers made his lips swollen for saying something that he didn't understand.

"Doy Ambi,..... .. suffering from head ache
... get panadol and gingerbeer go along the
side of the road .. . look on both sides and cross
the road the shop keeper 'll cheat on the
balance count and get the balance
close the entrance door carefully and go "

before Ambi passed the entrance door.....

"You get in "came from his father, Ambi stood watching his father go with a soda bottle to the shop. Ambi was fifteen.

"Doy Ambi,.... there'll be roundup, don't put of jeans..put on shorts only then you'll look a small boy"

Ambi was eighteen when he rode on his father's cycle pillion in shorts to tuition class. When he got the "Thinnamurasu" from Rasathee of the opposite house.....

"Why? You want to show that and this and pull my child to you?..."

The mother quarrelled. He watched Rasathee, in surprise, confronting his mother. He turned red in face and shy when Rasathee looked. Ambi was twenty-five. On going to see a girl for Ambi,.....

Ammah, I want to talk to your child.... .", when asked for the girl's hand" Get up .. you... Ambi this want suit our family... " Mother walked out brusquely.

Ambi was full of theethy smile... couldn't shut tight his mouth at the sudden change and the face turned crooked. Ambi was twenty-eight.

A wise saying "Experience is a wonderful comb, but by the time it reaches our hand we won't have any hair on our heads".

When parents realised that Ambi needed worldly experience the time had slipped away. He talked on his own and laughed and lived in his world of imagination.

What affected Ambi's imagination most was the history of king Kulakottu, which happened thousands of years before. Neither King Kulakottu nor his wife Arrdaka soundary did dominate Ambi's imagination but King Kulakottu's charioteer Mukilvannan and his wife Mullai did.

"The greatest hero who cut with mammoty sod in eight fold directions and cut the tree of seven span, tapped with a foot to load, yet before it fell, built, on earth a tank and therein filled with roaring waters" (Carving on Koneshar Rock)

The graceful hero who cut the earth on eight directions and cut a great tree of seven span, tapped to load with his foot and before it fell, he built on this earth a holy tank and filled it full with water.....

'Ah, Ha, oh! Wonderful king. How could I praise your patience" Mukilvannadn stood aghast watching the wide spread and expanded Kanthalai tank. Heard, suddenly the hoof beat of horses. The King's chariot passed Mukilvannan swiftly.

"Stop the chariot", shouting Mukilvannan ran fast behind the chariot the chariot stoped. The king alighted from the chariot and walked along the Anicut towards the slew. Mullai jumped off the chariot waving her hand. Ah Ha ! This indeed is the greatness of a wife. May you be blessed, you who charioted the chariot of the king in my

So saying, ran Mukilvannan towards Mullai, his wife... seeing Mukilvannan come running ... Mullai too ran... Mukilvannan chased... Mullai ran ... the thick forest approached.

"Oh goddess of the forest.. Mullai, where do you run stop, stop,"

..."Thuwanda eppa 'Thuwanda eppa' (Don't run)

The army that came chasing caught Ambi - Ambi was arrested for attempting to Blast Kanthalai Tank with bombs, but released later as being mentally affected.

At the kings palace; Mukilvannan waited on the chariot, for the King's arrival. There was delay..... whatever that delayed the king's coming.....?

Being on the chariot Mukilvannan watched the palace balcony..... "Addada, Isn't that my fairy on the balcony, Mukilvannan waved his hands toward the balcony... Mullai waved from there.....

Mukilvannan jumped off the chariot and leapt the steps of the balcony not seeing Mullai on the balcony Mukilvannan searched hither and thither..... The police carried off Ambi who went on the water tank mumbling Mullai.....Mullai... ..

Ambi was accused of attempting to poison the public water tank. The judge..." Why did you climb the water tank?"

"Your Majesty... .. I know of no offence I searched for Mullai on the balcony. The guards have brought me here..... ."

The judge put his hand on his head, then ordered to produce the case with a medical report.

Ambi was freed on the production of the medical report which proved his mental affliction.

"The temple, belled walls and Tower - the beautiful undamaged garden of flowers" (Carving on Knoeshar Rock) Ah, Ha!..... wonderfull..... ... wonderfull!..... Your majesty..... your service is indeed great? ...Mukilvannan sat forgetting himself in the nanthavanan.

"Ada... my cookoo bird, the song bird of my paradise..... where have you gone? When at this peak of Kobeshar festival, where has Mullai gone? So pondering within himself" Mullai come quickly, the pooja is going to start"..... Tow lasses, one companion dragging another by her hand went fast.....

"Adi Mullai when I'm here, where are you going? So saying..... Mukilvannan suddenly grabbed Mullai's hand.

'Palar! (Slap) Ambi held his cheek.

"That poor one is insane. Why did you slap? One companion rebuked the other.

"Adi Mullai is it you slapped me?, Answer me and go' Again Ambi tried to get near the group of women. Ambi was ridiculed and pushed out by the temple guards.

", Your majesty Is this your kind justice?.... you took my Mullai, away from me and attacked me with your guards Majesty is this your kingly justice?"

Ambi shouted aloud. The echo of the voice vibrated from low to very high pitch of different tones.

Madness has worsened Is Ambi mad?

"Neer Allaithathaha oru Gnapagam"

V.Gowrypalan

Translated by: L.A.Leon.

* * * * *

ENGLISH THEATRE IN BATTICALOA AND ITS RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

In considering the English theatre in Batticaloa, the foremost question that comes to my mind is, "Is there an English theatrical tradition in Batticaloa?". The answer I think, is yes and no. If we look for an English theatrical tradition outside educational institutions, the answer probably is no. There never seem to have existed a drama society or club independent of any institution. On the other hand to the question "Did schools in Batticaloa stage English plays", the response is positive. Drawing on the past experience of English plays in schools, it could be said that an English theatrical tradition in Batticaloa existed in some leading schools in the town (namely St Michael's College, St. Cecilia's College, Vincent Girls' High school, Methodist Central College, and Shivananda MV). There has existed a tradition of staging scenes from Shakespearean plays at special school functions.

Some over-used escape literary plays other than scenes from Shakespeare, like Cindrella, Red Riding Hood, the Sleeping Beauty and Snow-White and the Seven dwarfs have been continuously staged at most school functions. They are still in the forefront as popular means of entertainment at school functions.

The prevalent stage in the English theatrical tradition can be related to the common factor referred to by Tissa Jeyatilaka in his address "Sri Lankan drama in English". "The state of affairs that we find in the English theatre of Sri Lanka is the natural outcome of a historical fact. Western dramatic literature is a tradition brought by the British to Sri Lanka; and just as much as most other "things British" absorbed by the locals, are confined to those that form the urban sector of our society, this tradition too struck roots in the very congenial surroundings provided for it by urbanized Western-oriented intelligentsia of the land which were quick to accept uncritically, and quicker to ape those nuances of western taste that they deemed fashionable".

The use of role plays and then dramas to motivate the teaching and learning of English become popular in schools in and after 1986 with the Ministry of Education taking the initiative to organise school, district, provincial and national level English drama competitions. Due to time constraints, easy accessibility, simplicity, and popularity, the above mentioned popular plays have constantly been staged.

In the past few years, English drama stages in Batticaloa have seen a slight deviation from the common, over-used traditional stage presentations. The experiences of the DELIC graduates in adapting stories into stage plays actually done as an enrichment activity in language development during the training period - has enabled some enthusiastic teachers to stage such adaptations for the English drama competitions. One such adaptation was the short story "The Diamond Necklace" by Nirmali Hetiarachi. Similarly sections from Treasure Island and Oliver Twist were adapted and staged by students of Methodist Central College and St. Michael's College respectively.

From the series of one act plays "The Bishop's candle stick" was presented by Vincent Girls' High School, "The proposal" by Anton Chokov and another play "The Richmond Hotel" were staged by the Batticaloa Delic trainees in 1995. There may be still others that I am not aware of. Several reasons could be considered for this break away from the usual Shakespearean plays.

1. Those involved in the production of Shakespearean plays were the older generation of English Medium educated teachers familiar with such plays and the language. The casts were mostly from students who had done English elocution and often the same set of students participated year after year in different plays making it easy for the directors / teachers to train.
2. Most of the new generation of English teachers, either, are not familiar with or do not have the confidence to handle Shakespearean plays and the students who are not fluent in English do not have the ability to memorize and present the dialogue. This actually discourages teachers from going in for Shakespearean plays.
3. Although, the general audience are attracted by the movements and actions, they fail to understand Shakespearean language and the over-accented elocution English.

To date, stage directions have been done by English teachers who have had a little or no stage experience, nor were they aware of proper theatrical techniques involved. The teachers did what they thought was best to make the presentations entertaining, even cinematic style and movements were used in stage plays. These producers/teachers often failed to make the casts internalize the characters or to make them understand their role in relation to the whole play. These lapses on the part of the directors made the characters ineffective.

My intention here is not to denigrate the excellent contribution made by English teachers for English theatre in Batticaloa but to emphasize the need for creating awareness in theatrical techniques and stage performance. In this frame of reference, it would be gratifying if the Fine Arts Department of Eastern University, Sri Lanka take the initiative to educate and encourage the school teachers for better stage performances in the future.

While tracing the English theatrical tradition in Batticaloa, I consider it relevant to review *Riders to the sea* performed at the Fine Arts theatre, Eastern University on 19th November 1997.

I deem that a new dimension and transitional phase for English drama in Batticaloa has been prompted by Mr.S.Jeyashankar of the Department of Fine Arts, in collaboration with the English Language Teaching Unit (ELTU), of the Eastern University through the play *"Riders to the Sea"* by Synge. I am sure it was a challenging venture and calls for the commendation of the principal, teachers and students of St.Cecilia's College who came forward to work out on this experimentation.

On the whole *"Riders to the Sea"* has a success story and this was reflected in the behaviour of the audience who physically and emotionally accepted this temporarily as the real world.

The stage production of *"Riders to the Sea"* has gone through various phases of proper theatrical aspects thus making it the first play to experience organised development, so I would consider this to be a mile stone in the English theatrical tradition in Batticaloa. I hope this would pave the way for better and more stage presentation in English in the future.

MY WISHES

Oh, Bat, may you live long,
worldly path denied,
you that make your own,
Such individuality,
Oh, my guide, May you live long.

"You're in everything
upside down" thus ,
my family when rebukes
Oh, a rare medication
may you live long.

Travellers, in Pretence Sacrificed
life, for law and order
and tradition to live,
celebrated daylight that
you repulsed,
May you live long.

Within dark nights incomprehensible
way, though instinct sort
By juicy fragrance drawn
never illusion' d by appearance
you in pristine relationship
Life prospered
may you live long.

I, like you,
To the world's eyes
a creature, that hangs
upside down.

It's a crime indeed
To hold firm in truth
and stand erect-when
The world'd turned
upside down in lies.

Oh, Bat may you live long,
Oh, my ambition,
May you live long.

Vasudevan.

THE MAN WHO SAID 'NO'

(A rather free adaptation of a Brechtian parable)

(A hut in a forest clearing. Dusk is falling. The furious barking of a dog)

Man: (looks middle-aged, a rather nondescript individual) : Jimmy, Jimmy, shut up, come back here.

Woman: (Slightly stooped, somewhat older than her husband) : Something must have upset him, he never barks like this.

(The door of the hut is kicked violently several times. Before it is kicked down, the man hurriedly opens it. A uniformed man swaggers in surrounded by bodyguards).

The swaggerer: Listen you old man and old hen. I am boss around here. Do you hear? My word is law. (He motions to his companions to tie up the couple and search the hut)

Half an hour later, after searching every nook and corner of the hut and the compound outside, they return and announce they haven't found anything.

Swaggerer: Okay, untie the. Listen, you old fool. I am the boss. Will you carry out my orders or not? Answer me. Say yes' or 'no'

(The man keeps mum. The swaggerer insists on an answer several times finally loses patience and slaps the man hard, sending him scrawling, The man neither moans nor utters a word).

Woman: (falls at the swaggerer's feet and begs him): Please don't hit him sir. He is a good man. He is slightly deaf. I'll carry out all your commands.

Swaggerer: First, get us all a good cup of tea.

Woman: Yes, sir.

Swaggerer: Ah, that was a really nice cup of tea . Good, now prepare us a very good dinner, with chicken curry.

Woman: Yes, sir.

This routine goes on day and night, for several years. The only variation is about menu and occasional orders to sweep the hut, the compound and make the beds. The man sometimes helps his wife with these chores, taking pity on her. Then one day suddenly there is heavy firing close to the hut. Swaggerer and his companions escape through the back door, a group of armed men burst in through the front door. One of them shoots the swaggerer before he can draw his pistol. After hurriedly searching the couple and the hut, the attackers leave in hot pursuit of the swaggerer's companions.

Man: (to woman): Dear, help me to lift this lout's body and throw it out. (Both of them half drag, half carry the swaggerer's corpse to the entrance).

Man: (as they roll the body out, the man in a firm voice) : My answer is 'no'.

A. J. Canagaratna

THE MAN WHO PUT THE CHUTZPAH INTO POETRY

Book review:

(Tambimuttu: Bridge Between two worlds - Edited by Jane Williams)

"Bliss was in that dawn to be alive / But to be young was very heaven". It might seem on the face of it hyperbole to apply Wordsworth's ecstatic outburst to delight at the appearance of a mere poetry magazine. But that is how we felt about Poetry London in the early days of the Second World War- those of us, that is, who were teenage novices and bursting to break into print.

It was the end of a decade of poetic squabbling: the New Apocalypse rising to confront the grey eminence of the Pylon Poets, Julian Symons' Twentieth Century Verse standing aloof and Geoffrey Grigson's New Verse pouring acid on the whole boiling. Into this petty world there sailed a vision, a dream called Tambimuttu who had the chutzpah to proclaim that "every man has poetry within him".

We all went quietly mad and sent our poems to Tambi by the cartload. Sometimes there was actually an acknowledgment, saying that our hero had liked what he seen. What better excuse, then, to visit him in the tiny crowded office that his publishers Nicolson and Watson had given him at Craven House in Kingsway, London.

By now a year, perhaps two, had gone by. We were different on leave from the Forces. But Tambi had not changed. Beautiful, shy yet friendly, he made it seem as if you were the sole object of his attention. The heart sank, perhaps, at what seemed like hundreds of other people's manuscripts piled in disorder around him, but a quick trip round the corner to The Princess Louise and the sinking a quite remarkable number of pints brought eternal friendship and the promise of publication.

Who was Tambi? What was he, that all his friends commend him? He was a Jaffna Tamil, born in 1915 in Ceylon who came to England in 1938 and almost immediately made him self a leading figure in the London literary scene. His family was Catholic and prominent, an uncle having been distinguished Jesuit lexicographer.

But Meary James, as he was christened, preferred to think of himself as a Hindu, and took to calling himself "Thurai Rajah".

In London, Tambi made Fitzrovia. He was always so gentle and enthusiastic that one felt one would do anything for him, but there was another side to his nature which is touched on by one of the contributors to Tambimuttu, a

collection of poems and pieces about him edited by Jane Williams. Grover Amen quotes himself as telling Tambi that he was a "crazy, drunken conartist ... a lost, soul a misfit..

True, of course. He drank himself silly and produced nothing of his own that was memorable. The long poem called "Gita Sarasvati", which appears at the end of William's book and which she calls 'certainly my favourite of all his writings', is a prosy attempt to expound Hindu philosophy, clumsily derivative from The Four Quarters.

As an editor, however, Tambimuttu was superb. He produced the most inspiring and attractive magazine of verse that Britain had seen since Georgian poetry. T.S. Eliot smiled on the project and everyone appeared in its pages, from Dylan Thomas, Stephen Spender and Kathleen Raine to the least unknown who had produced a poem which caught Tambi's eye.

That was the secret of his success. Although he was an incorrigible name-dropper, he was also a true democrat. His "nose", as he called it, led him to publish, among the 62 books of Editions Poetry London, Nabokov's The Real Life of Sebastian Knight, Henry Moore's Shelter Sketch Book, and Henry Miller's The Cosmological Eye.

Fifty years after his initial impact on London literary life and six years after his death it is good to be reminded of what he did - although not all of the 70 pieces printed in Williams' collection are worthy to have seen the light of day. Apart from friends in the early days such as Patricia Ledwood, Nicholas Moore and well-known names like Iris Murdoch and Mulk Raj Anand, it is irritating not to know who all these people are. At the price, also, an index would not have been out of order.

The editor is described as "a close friend" of Tambimuttu for the last 10 years of his life. But the 60 year old Tambi that she knew was not the free spirit who delighted us in the 1940's. His time in the US was not a success and when he returned to England it was clear that the rot had set in.

Man does not live by charm alone, and all the king's horses and all the king's could not put Tamvi together again. Williams, who has keen eye done her best and perhaps this is not more than could have done, Gossip keeps Tambi's memory alive; judgement would have been harsher.

-Geoffrey Moore From Lanka Guardian.

WILL A WAIT YOU...

Most handsome Aththaan
Born to affectionate Maami dear,
Here I, your ever-loving
Paarimachchaarl do write,
At close of harvest in April
is set, our marriage to be
So said Ammaarchi,
and so do I write

In the Paatty, the Valli pasu,
brought forth a calf a male.
So, your name have I given
and thus call him by.
For Vattyaddy Vyravar
A pongal on coming Monday.
By cart, we all do go.
So, do come along.

For Matthalam and kuthu folklore,
a `kalari", set up in the centre.
In Chiththirai, in our village, Right round muspathy
On full moon, a rehearsal in Salangi
And the Pariyari Kudi poosai
For Vaalaveeman Kuthu,
Annavi is Nallathamby.

Thrashing on Kallam fulfilled,
Paddy stacks, the abodes fill
On the moon lit fields
Youths'll champion Killithattu.
On the muchchanthi tarmarin
the village'll on swings dance.
Chththirai does draw near,
So you, do come along.

A shell, falling did ward
Perriyappa at the big hospital.
At moothappa's junction
has mushroomed a sentry point.
Mariamman Poosari.
Succumbed to army fire.
Do bring, without fail
Your identity.

Pattie miled ghee
melted in chatti
Delicious delicacies-in
Ariyatharam and sohi served
on leaf out spread on vaddil
Sweetened in vellam,
Like solid curd like,
Do I here await, please do—do come.

CULTURE RELATED VOCABULARY

Aththaan	- Male Second Cousin (to be husband).
Maami	- Second auntie (Father's sister)
Paari	- Name
Machchaarl	- Female Second Cousin
Ammarchi	- Second Uncle (Mother's brother)
Patty	- Cattle pen
Valli Pasu	- Cow named Valli
Vattyaddy Vyrava	- Deity - of the place vatty
Pongal	- milk rice with lot of sweet a fold drumkuthy - a fold on the from of tythemic dance recital
Kalari	- arena (circular shape)
Chiththirai	- month of Aprilsoon after harvest, Time of Plenty
Muspaathy	- Fun and frolic.
Salangai	- A string of small bud like bells arranged in rows to be tiedon to the legs of dancers.
Pariyari Kudipoosai	- Native physicians family religion service
Vaalaveemankuthu	- Valeveeman - a character in the epic maha Bratham.
Annavi	- one who directs kuthu.
Kallazn	- separated from the straw.
Killithattu	- Village game
Muchchanthi	- `T' junction
Perriyappa	- elder brother of father
Moothappa	- grand father
Mariamman Poosari	- Name of a hindu priest
Chatti	- clay pot
Ariyatharam, sohi	-sweets made of sweetened rice flour, baked in oil.
Vaddil	- a tray like high rimmd plate, made of Brass
Vellazn	- Jaggery.

Whatever the precautions one took, however careful one was, the mistake recurs. He noticed it only when he tried to lock his bicycle.

The cycles' lock was missing.

It was a very old cycle, a Raleigh which had been bought in 1972 for Rs.1401=.

There was no guarantee that an old cycle wouldn't be stolen. The fear that the cycle would be stolen had made him devise a lock for the cycle- a one and a half foot long chain, a red-coloured rubber hose of the same length and an old padlock.

Though that lock had been devised for the cycle, his wife used it at home to serve several purposes: to lock the fowl-run at night, or to lock the front gate if the padlock usually used for the purpose had been misplaced.

He remembered she had taken it last night to lock the fowl-run.

Cursing his wife inwardly, he was wondering what to do when a thought suddenly strike him.

'If the bike can be left in a neighboring house, it'll be safe'.

Wheeling the bicycle, he came to the main road, It looked as if there was no house which would satisfy his fancy. He hesitated for a short while and then peeped into that small house with a single gate. There was no one in sight. Without thinking any further, he wheeled his bicycle inside.

Just then that little girl- she may have been nine or ten-came out. She was dark and her limbs were spindly. Her face, however, was chubby and vivacious. Her eyes were large and perpetually smiling. She looked at him affectionately.

He took a liking for her at very first sight. She was wearing a cotton dress with faded red dots. Her sweet glance seemed to ask what he wanted.

"There's no lock for the cycle.... that's why ... can I leave it here and go? .. I have to go for a funeral nearby...."

The young princess merely nodded assent.

"Where are the grown-ups?"

"Amma has gone to the kade".

Did she mean her mother or the mistress of the house when she referred to amma, he wondered.

He was a bit confused. He couldn't pluck up the courage to ask. He parked the cycle along the eastern wall, taking care that the seat did not rub against the cement, and went out.

At the funeral house, Paranthamna's colleagues on the teaching staff and his students - both boys and girls - outnumbered the kith and kin.

The thought of his tragic death troubled him. "How cruel that death should come to him at thirty one. There was a growing intimacy between him and Eeaswar..... they were to have been married in a couple of months why had all these hopes been shattered?"

'His enthusiasm, his dedication to work, his ability to teach according to the capacities of his pupils al these had been made meaningless by a single bullet.....'

Many were of the opinion that he had been killed in the crossfire. But some whispered. 'No, no he had some links, that's why.....'

(Whatever the cause, his death had been inevitable, the cause of grief).

Just inside the entrance, he lay stretched in a coffin. When he looked at him, he felt as if someone had struck him hard on the chest and the face. The cruelty of his death assailed him as a fellow human being. Troubled in mind, he came out and sat on the verandah after viewing the corpse.

Within a few minutes of his coming out, the funeral procession began.

When he was debating within himself whether to go to the crematorium or not, it was Pasipathy who almost dragged him to the crematorium.

Are the smell of blood and the stench of corpses to be the fate of this soil? How long is such an abnormal life going the last?"

Though it was afternoon, he could hear somewhere in the distance the poopala raga wafted over the radio.

'How absurd..... !! Why is everything so topsy-turvy....? When will life regain its order and harmony ? Will everything become a distant dream.... ..?'

As the funeral procession got on to the main road, he remembered his bicycle. His glance strayed to the small house. The cycle was exactly where he had left it.

He felt ashamed that he should have thought of his bicycle in the midst of such grief.

The crematorium lay in a vast expanse where the blue sky, the dark sea and the earth met and embraced one another.

When the tongues of flame licked at Paranthamnan's body, he shivered slightly and his eyes became moist. All his feelings seemed to have become frozen. He looked at Pasupathy who was talking animatedly with someone.

'Why is it that nothing seems to have touched Pasupathy?'

As they left the crematorium, it began to rain. He sought shelter in Pasupathy's umbrella.

"It's a passing cloud, machchan. It'll cease soon".
"This life, its meaning.... are they all passing clouds?"

He was surprised by his philosophical probing into the nature of life and death.

Pasupathy chattered away, without showing sign of fatigue. He couldn't be like that. His mind was like a bird with a broken wing.

When the rain ceased, patches of blue sky could be glimpsed in the east. How soon the sky had cleared up. He felt the pressures on his mind easing.

As they came to the main road, he took leave of Pasupathy.

He remembered his bicycle.

'Would the tyres be deflated....? That girl... her

brother may have tampered with the valve tube..... ..'

He felt as if he had emerged from a dream and once again stepped into the normal world.

The sense of weariness had not left him though. A surprise was awaiting him when he reached the house where he had left his cycle.

The cycle had been taken and carefully left under the 'sunshade' to prevent its getting wet.

'Whose handiwork was this?... Could that child have moved it... it would have been difficult for her supposing she had got hurt if it fell on her ~when she tried to take it or would she have bruised herself trying to wheel it.....'

As he took the cycle, she came running out, wiping her wet hand on her frock.

"It was raining That's why..... "

"What if it rained, child? Why did you take all this trouble?"

His broken heart made whole again, he looked at her with affection.

She seemed to him life's meaning, the bearer of life's continuing flame.

Gratitude gushed up in him; he patted her head fondly and took leave of her.

He opened the gate; when he tried to take the cycle out, it struck against the gate.

"Be careful when you take it out..... the pedal will strike"

He looked back. She stood there, her face dimpled with smiles.

Only after he had come out, it struck him that he had forgotten to find out the child's name.

'Everything comes to you belatedly' He recalled his wife's oft repeated utterance.

If I come again to Colombogam, I must make it a point to look up this child and find out her name. "He made a mental note of this.

He felt his mind was spreading out its wings in elation. The mental worry caused by Paranthaman's death seemed to ease gradually. Everything appeared beautiful to him.

The grace of the girl who cycled past him in the opposite direction, the maturity manifested in the face of a small boy who was carrying a load too heavy for him, the gaiety of the school in uniform riding abreast, their hands on each other's shoulders the beauty of an unknown girl glimpsed God alone known when in the bus that turned at Bastina's Junction, all these filled him with delight.

It was as if he was experiencing all the marvels and beauties of the world.

Forgetting himself, he trod on the cycle pedal, humming a sarukesi raga. The cycle seemed to gather unusual speed. He felt as if he was floating on air.

K. Saddanathan,

Translated by:
A. J. Canagaratne

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POETRY LONDON

Poetry London, was the leading poetry magazine of the 1940s and caught much of the character of the decade. It was started in 1939 by Anthony Dickins and the Ceylonese James Tambimuttu, who became one of the most colourful and influential literary figures of the period. The founders raised money by subscription for six issues, but this ran out after two. A gift enabled the magazine to appear bimonthly for four more issues, starting November 1940. Issues 7 and 8 did not appear until 1942; issue 9

came out in 1943; and issue 10, in the form of a large book, in 1944. By that time Tambimuttu was engrossed in a new publishing venture, Editions Poetry London, under the imprint of Nicholson and Watson; they also supported Poetry London, which did not, however, appear again until the autumn of 1947. By then Nicholson and Watson had begun to find the venture too expensive; but Tambimuttu found a new backer in Richard March. March and the poet Nicholas Moore appeared as associate editors for issues 14 and 15; after which, in the autumn of 1949, March took control of Poetry London and edited it with Moore until its twenty-third and final issue in the winter of 1951.

Tambimuttu had returned to Ceylon in 1949. In 1956 he started Poetry London - New York; but again money ran out after a couple of years. His final try was Poetry London / Apple Magazine, with a first issue in 1979 and a second in 1982. He died in 1983.

The early issued of Poetry London opened with 'Letters', almost all by Tambimuttu in which he argued for a poetry that was spontaneous, incantatory, and responsive to the unconscious. He criticized *New Verse, a main organ of the social- realist poetry of the 1930s, as advocating a Poetry London became a voice of the New Romanticism of the 1940s (see New Apocalypse); yet the amount of rubbish published by Tambimuttu was small. Among the poets whose W.S. Graham, David Wright, Kathleen Raine, Lawrence Durrell, and Michael Hamburger. Tambimuttu published the first books of Bernard Spencer, Raine, and Wright, as well as David *Gascoyne's Poems 1937-43 and Durrell's Cefalu. He was among the first to recognize the talent of Keith Douglas.

Tribute is made to his achievements in Tambimuttu: Bridge Between Two Words, ed J. Williams, (London 1989).

A.T.Tolly

From: The Oxford Companion Twentieth Century Poetry in English

THE CUCKOO'S HOUSE

The distant burst of a shell brought him back to earth from his reverie.

Even the cuckoo was shocked. The bird raised its head and listened for a second. Its eyes glittered like two red beads. With the agility of a snake, the cuckoo-with a shiny black sheen sprinkled with white spots-slipped into the thick foliage and disappeared.

This tree is a multi-storied house for these birds. From its perfectly upright tall trunk branches radiated in all directions at regular intervals. The tree is on the other side of the wall, but very close to the boundary and shady. The people of his uncle's household living on this side enjoyed the shade more. It sheltered the verandah and the courtyard from the hot fore-noon sun.

Again there was another blast. Then, a third followed within a minute. His ears listened for any further explosions.....

He has seen cuckoos only in this tree and has been watching them almost from the first day of his coming here. Two of them are pure black while the other two were spotted. They look for the ripe berries on the tree, peck them, go whenever and wherever they want and return. They live here. One may hear their chirping and the flapping of their wings even during the middle of the nights. What a simple and trouble-free life!

His house was in the directions from where the sounds of explosions came. The shelling started a month ago and within this month, five or six of the houses in their village have been razed to the ground. But, luckily, all the people had evacuated the place on hearing the first sound of gun fire. That was the only way for them to save their lives.

The people came to this place with whatever they could carry. They thought this place was safe. They sought refuge went in search of temples or

schools. What would have happened to his house now?

To have a house of his own was a long-standing ambition in his life. It became a reality only a couple of years ago, after long toil. But, now-? Would he be able to go back to his house one day and live there again with his family? He heaved a long sigh.

He felt like an alien in this place, although his uncle and uncle's family were kind and considerate to him and his family. He felt stifled. He could do nothing and, worse still, he could see nothing ahead. It was intolerable.

He spent the major part of the day in this verandah, starting at the blue sky or watching this tree.

...He shuddered. This time the sound was close. No, wasn't shell, but some heavy object striking a hard surface.

With the second thud that seemed to emerge from the other side of the wall, he noticed the tree shivering and the small yellow leaves falling...

What? Someone cutting down this tree? he wondered.

The sound continued. But, why? What's the purpose? It's timber will not be any use even to cover a bunker:

The poor birds.... What'll happen to the house of theirs? Where'll they go?

He couldn't bear it. He wanted to shout over the boundary wall: "Don't fell the tree." The impulse was so strong that he got up.

But, suddenly, he sat down again on the steps and burst into fitful sobbing.

A. Santhan

(Author of 7 collections of stories, a novel and travelogue in Tamil; and a collection of stories in English, 'The Sparks'. Engineering Technician by profession)

Paleface rather than Redskin

Among Souvenirs- a novel by Regi Siriwardena, published by the International Centre for Ethnic Studies, Colombo. Rs.200/=

This is Regi Siriwardena's second novel and blurb tells us it is "one so different from his first that readers may find it surprising that it is by the same writer."

Regi's second novel differs from his first, The Lost Lenore (1996) in that its characterisation is more complex and rounded than The Lost Lenore whose characterisation was deliberately flat (after all it was a tale which set out to prove, as it were, the 'thesis' of hybridity). Some readers who seem to have overlooked this aspect of The Lost Lenore complained that they found parts of the dialogue wooden and stilted.

Apart from characterisation, Regi's second novel doesn't set out to prove any thesis and its canvas is wider. The blurb helpfully informs us that the "narrative, spanning the years between 1936 and 1958, intertwines the destinies of the characters with the political events and social divisions of that time, containing within them the seeds of conflict and violence."

Both novels exhibit a fluent narrative skill and Regi's style is pellucid. Wherein lies the difference then?

The Lost Lenore is, self confessedly, hybrid in form, in keeping with its thesis of hybridity. Is Among M Souvenirs an autobiographical novel? No, says the author. In the Author's note, he says "In the personal realm, this is not an auto biographical novel. Although, like many other novelists, I have used fragments of personal experience here and there, these have been distributed among several characters and interwoven with imagined events and relationships. I have been particularly concerned to keep the first person narrator's family situation, early upbringing and attitudes to many things different from mine." It could hardly be called a political novel either, though the destinies of the characters are intertwined with the political events and social events of that time (1936-1958)

What Among My Souvenirs tries to do is to fuse the personal and the social-political by showing how political events and social divisions impinge on a group of characters who move up from an elite public school to the Varsity. Does the author succeed in fusing the personal and the public realms? Not fully, in my opinion. The author's strategy is basically correct not the strategy per se but the particular use made of it here that has gone away.

The Strongest parts of the novel are those where he vividly evokes the atmosphere of Bethlehem, the anglicised private school, and the Varsity (his evocations of the Geyser and the Grinder are particularly sharp). His description of the school, its staff and students, foreshadows the events to come especially 1956. This section and Michael Ondaatje's Running In The Family make it clear to a non-Sinhala reader like me why the 1956 Ballot Revolution was inevitable: the Sinhalese were virtually 'two nations'.

Ajith Samaranayake (Sunday Observer, Deember 14, 1997) in his review of the novel remarks "In

that sense he is at his best in dealing with the personal relationships and events and this I feel is the central failing of the work in the sense that there is no satisfactory synthesis of the personal and the political." I'm afraid, I have to agree.

The first person narration while making for a certain inwardness (especially in the moving Epilogue) as far as the narrator, David Shelton Gunawardene, is concerned, also makes a certain externality inevitable as far as the other characters are concerned. Apart from this, there is no organic fusion and a rather tenuous one, at the level of plot, though I grant that Regi's sureness of narrative touch makes it sound plausible enough.

After a silence of more than ten years, Mark writes to David Shelton in 1957 (the year is significant) telling him about his inner transformation and informing him that he'll be returning to Ceylon. The concluding lines of his letter turn out to be prophetic: "I suppose if I returned to Ceylon and there was some outbreak of communal violence at some point where I was, I could be a victim merely because I would be labelled a Tamil, though I feel no more Tamil than Sinhalese or Patagonian or Eskimo. However that possibility doesn't and won't trouble me. I am trying to live without attachment to life."

Mark's letter is Regi's sophisticated, modern version of the deus ex machina, which helps the novelist to link his characters (Mark and Girle, a victim of mistaken identity , in this instance) with the anti-Tamil race riots of 1958.

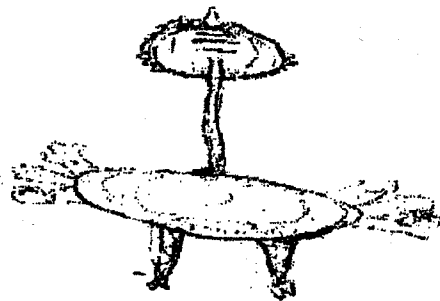
It's ironic but quite in keeping with his character that Mark who had written to David saying that he felt no more Tamil than Sinhala or Patagonian or Eskimo should have drawn himself up and defiantly said Yes, I'm a Tamil when questioned by a gang of hoodlums on an anti-Tamil rampage, and paid for it with his life.

The limitations of the novel are those of the author's class. No one can completely transcend his or her class background. Regi is no exception, despite his flair for narration and technical dexterity. In my view, the problem with this novel is that it is essentially a Paleface's version of the period. If there had been a dialectic between Paleface and Redskin, the novel might have been a finer achievement.

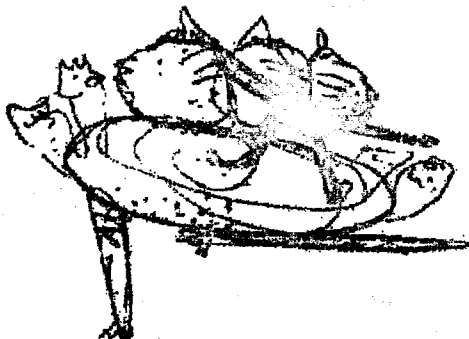
A.J.Canagaratna



While penning an elaborate letter to your query about
pilliar the war was broke out.
Continuous and constant displacement -
Lacking permanent address -
No respite to sit down and pen a letter.
At this moment I am writing this letter-
After recovering from a fearful attack of malaria.



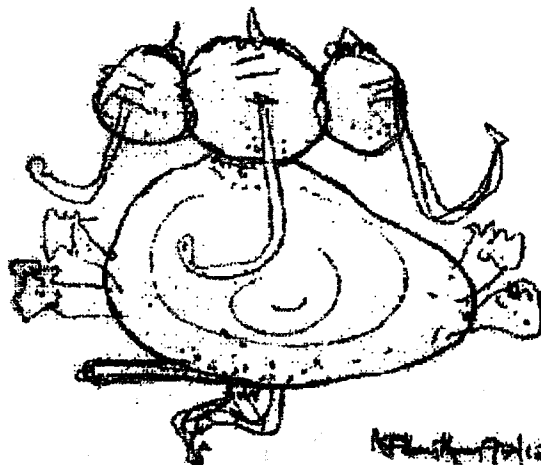
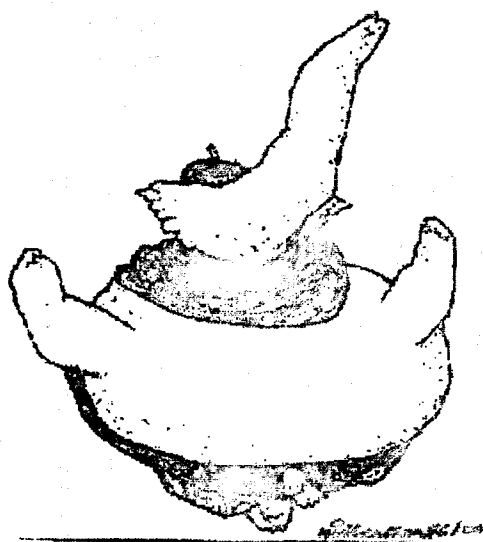
M. Nilanthan



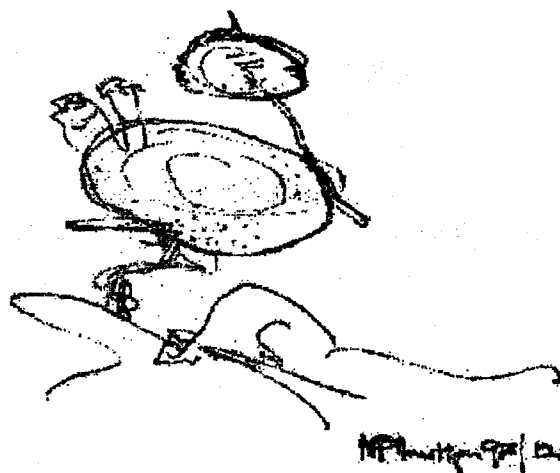
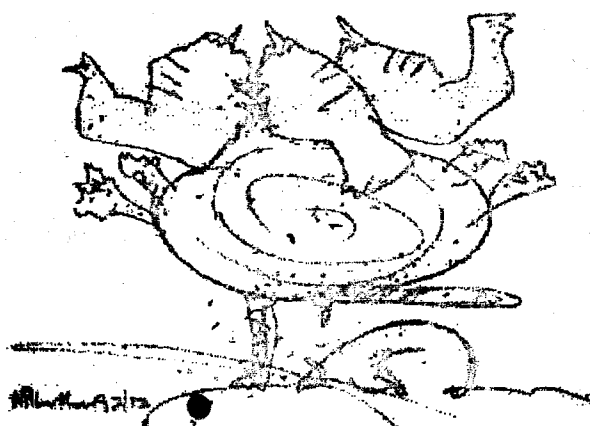
M. Nilanthan

My Pilliar of 96 (about 30) have all migrated to Jaffna
Presently after the malaria Pillaiar of 97 - Jayasikrui Pillaiar
have suddenly blasted high and have started to arrive .
Jeysankar, to all queries about Pillaiar I will answer in a
single line.
Here it is!
Pillaiar is my war-painting.

M. Nilanthan



M. Nilanthan



M. Nilanthan

Third Eye

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