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Religion, history, food and incarceration are the themes explored in this issue. There are some who would be able to see a connection between all four and others who will think that they are entirely separate subjects.

In this issue Jeremy Gantz discusses his theory that the approach in teaching history and religion in Sri Lankan schools, could probably be the most damaging in the interests of national cohesion. By studying the school curriculum with emphasis on these two subjects he reveals the reality of a syllabus divided by a long list of variables where the ethnic and social divisions are transmitted to the students to a disturbing degree.

In her opinion piece Rossana Favero-Karunaratne examines the case of the Fujimori political family in Peru. Despite his fleeing the country amidst an air of scandal his daughter Keiko Fujimori is an important player in the political arena today. Favero-Karunaratne charts the history of the Japanese immigrants to Peru and the political attitude of the second generation. The two poets featured, Sunela Jayawardene and John Mateer have elements of the sufi in them. One takes us to Balangoda in Sri Lanka while the other allows us a glimpse of Singapore. Then we have Asitha Amarasekera’s wonderful short story linking food, love and life and the long short story by Yoo Jae-Hyun which realistically reveals the cold world of drug prisoners in a Hong Kong prison. Finally we have Anushka Pereira’s wonderful photographs accompanying the pieces in this issue.

I wish you a happy and peaceful New Year.

Ameena Hussein

Ethnic conflict and cohesion in Sri Lankan public schools

Jeremy Gantz

Education and Economic Competition

Perhaps nothing besides cricket provides Sri Lankan children with as much stress, competition and controversy as government schools. The popular obsession with attending supposedly superior “national schools” and the necessity of passing O-level and A-level exams sends otherwise healthy students and parents into paroxysms of anxiety, suspicion and deception. Parents falsify residency documents or simply bribe the principals of competitive national schools for their child’s Grade 1 admission. If these illegal admission processes fail to work, they might threaten a principal’s life or organize their children to protest at the gates of a school – as happened at C.W.W. Kannangara Vidyalaya and D.S. Senanayake College, respectively, in Colombo in 2004. Parents send their children to after-school “tuition” classes as early as the 2nd grade, and students commute hours to attend prestigious urban national schools – but still attend tuition classes, just like their provincial school peers, to prepare for the exams which their fates hinge upon. And every so often, if their stress is too great and their scores too low, young students denied advancement to A-levels or University commit suicide.

The stakes and competition levels are too high and the daily newspaper headlines too frightening to allow students to put schoolwork aside for long. In the first four months after December 2004 grade 1 admission process, the Ministry of Education’s Director of National Schools was fired following irregular admissions to a leading Colombo school, and a handful of principals from the most competitive national schools were interdicted. During this same period the Presidential Investigation Unit, in charge of regulating school admissions, received more than 1,500 complaints of corruption against 115 school principals throughout

the island. Even if many of these complaints are false, the fact that parents might be embittered enough to formally complain is a clear reminder of the intensely competitive atmosphere that usually reigns in the government schools of developing countries.

The problem of competition in schools is not a new one, although with the growth of the “tuition” industry and admissions corruption during the last few decades, it does seem to be taking on a more virulent form. During the British colonial period, entrance into one of the few English-medium missionary or government schools was a crucial element of “local” elite status. Then, as now, educational competition was one of the greatest manifestations of economic and social competition. But colonial-era educational competition was nothing compared to the competition which is the dubious hallmark of Sri Lanka’s contemporary school system. This system, enlarged by the state on a massive scale in the 1940s and 1950s, hosts over four million students – or one-fifth of the Sri Lankan population – each day. But only a tiny fraction of these students will ever attend a university.

Education, Social Unrest, Political Violence

In retrospect, it seems almost inevitable that such a competitive and relatively democratic educational system would become inextricably linked to the politics of language and ethnicity which emerged so forcefully during the 1950s. In fact, Sri Lanka’s educational system has played a central role in the ethnic, religious and political problems of the last fifty years. With the extension of state control over education and the implementation of *swabasha* (mother tongue) educational policies complete by 1960-1, the policies and classrooms of a linguistically segregated educational system were ripe to become major instigators and sites of the political and ethnic conflicts to follow. Education, at its core a site of economic competition, became communalized, and thus developed into a site of ethnic competition. Unfortunately, these developments have meant that during the last fifty years Sri Lanka’s public education system has often conspicuously failed to meet

the two central goals for which modern public school systems exist: employment preparation and social/political cohesion.

Despite Sri Lanka’s impressive educational achievements over the last fifty years – its literacy rate is now 92% and in 1999 the literacy gender parity index was 0.96 – its economy still does not require a large educated workforce. The small intake of the national university system reflects this, as it should: only about 3% of Sri Lankan students will ever enter its coveted free classrooms, although an additional 8% will enroll in other tertiary level technical and vocational courses. Even more telling, though, is the fact that despite such limited tertiary education opportunities the highest unemployment rates have long been found among young educated Sri Lankans – those who completed O/L or A/L exams or actually attended University.¹ The persistent fact of unemployed educated youth has been all too visible and combustible in the last thirty-five years, during which this demographic effectively led the JVP insurrections of 1971 and 1987-89 and founded the LTTE and other extremist Tamil organizations in the 1970s.

Sri Lanka’s post-Independence history clearly shows the perils of expanding an educational system beyond an economy’s graduate absorption capacity and of completely dividing that centralized system along linguistic lines – even while in the admirable interests of democratization. By growing faster than the economy, the school system has ironically failed to fulfill its economic function by *over-educating* its graduates. In doing so, it simultaneously failed to fulfill its important social function by sowing the seeds of political and ethnic unrest. It is to this second function of schools – to encourage social and political cohesion – and to current government efforts to fulfill it that this essay turns. It is an outside observer’s attempt to answer the question: How are schools exacerbating Sri Lanka’s ethnic tensions and what might they do to lessen them?

Schools and ‘National Cohesion’

The National Education Commission (NEC), the government policy body created in response to the 1987-89 JVP

insurrection, stated in its inaugural 1992 report that the first “National Goal” of Sri Lanka’s school system is “[t]he achievement of National Cohesion, National Integrity and National Unity.” This was more emphatic restatement than significant change in policy, for all government schools systems, but especially those as centralized as Sri Lanka’s, by definition encourage political and social cohesion. What was new in 1992 was an awareness that schools needed to do *more* in working for this cohesion. But, thirteen years later, the NEC’s progressive statement appears to be nothing more than optimistic and well-meaning rhetoric: actual state educational efforts toward “National Cohesion” since then have been slow and ineffectual at best.

With the increasingly precarious status of the 2002 Cease-Fire Agreement and the general recognition that significant island-wide economic development can occur only after peace becomes permanent, the role of schools as peace-makers – and, by extension, economic stimulators – is as pertinent today as it has been over the last twenty-two years of conflict. In this context, we should ask: How do Sri Lanka’s government schools encourage and work toward national cohesion, integrity and unity? How are these schools enhancing or diminishing the prospects of ethnic co-existence and long-term peace in Sri Lanka?

Although the discriminatory university admission policies of the 1970s triggered the greatest flashpoint of ethnic conflict in the education system since Independence, it is the general (primary/secondary) education system which remains the venue for government efforts toward social cohesion. 83% of Sri Lankan children complete 9th grade, while around 80% complete 11th grade and only 30% complete 13th grade. Only 3% will reach university. To have the greatest effect, the government’s social cohesion policies therefore must be directed at the general education system, which the great majority of students pass through.

In the context of the NEC’s 1992 “National Cohesion” policy proclamation, this essay examines the relevant content – the religion and social studies curricula – and the structure – schools segregated by language, religion and often class – of Sri Lanka’s

primary and secondary schools from the perspective of ethnic and political cohesion. Together, the content and structure of these schools provide a unique window into Sri Lankan society by revealing the gap between the clichéd Independence Day rhetoric of “unity within diversity” and the reality of a society divided by a long list of variables. The schools transmit, to an alarming degree, the ethnic and social divisions running throughout Sri Lanka. By doing so they act as a thermometer of contemporary conflict.

School Curricula and the Division of Religions

The way in which religion is taught in Sri Lankan schools – through both textbooks and school prayer – makes clear, perhaps more than any other school subject, how educational systems function as repositories of conservative values and protectors of the cultural and social status quo. The national religion curriculum follows the most conservative and divisive educational path possible. Although all Sri Lankan students study religion from grades 1-11, this religion curriculum is splintered into five different curricula, each with its own textbook and teachers: Buddhism, Hinduism (or Saivism), Islam, Roman Catholicism and “Christianity” (Protestantism). It is standard practice that schools with multi-religious student bodies separate their students into different classrooms for their respective religion classes. Students are thus denied by curricular design any chance to study other religions in schools, and instead are taught only their parents’ religion in a vacuum.

Depending on the size of a school’s religious minorities, the religion of those minorities may or may not be taught. Some Sinhala-medium schools with small Christian or Muslim minorities, for example, do not offer Christianity or Islam classes; these Christian and Muslim students either study their religion outside of school, presumably at mosques and churches, or simply take the available Buddhist class to prepare for their mandatory O-level religion exam.

The distance between government schools and *pansalas*, *kovils*, mosques and churches is very short. Nearly every

government school functions as a de facto place of worship, meaning that each religion curriculum transmitted through schools is constituted by both textbooks *and* school-sponsored worship. Monks teach Buddhism in many majority Sinhala-Buddhist schools, while nuns sometimes teach Catholicism at former missionary schools. On a daily or weekly basis, Buddhist and Hindu students pray at shrines featured prominently in their respective schoolyards, many Catholic students attend mass in churches adjacent to their schools, and students at Muslim schools visit school prayer rooms. While the majority religious group visits the school shrine or attends church, the minority religious groups either go to separate spaces of worship set aside for them by school administrators or watch the other students pray from a distance. Thus multi-religious government schools engage their students in a daily paradox: they are brought together by a centralized educational system only to be divided for religion class and worship.

The problem is not that schools double as places of worship. Given the primacy of religion in Sri Lankan society, this should hardly be surprising. Rather, the problem is that the potential of religion in schools to be a vehicle of peace and ethnic cohesion remains mostly untapped. Ideally, the textbook/exam half of the religious curricula would not be limited to each student's particular religion but would instead provide a substantial introduction to all four of the religions commonly practiced throughout Sri Lanka. This, rather than eleven years studying only one's own religion, would be appropriate preparation for the reality of life in a multi-religious and pluralistic society. In this ideal curriculum, separate school prayer would occur within the context of multi-religious classrooms and textbooks rather than serving to emphasize the divisiveness of the current religion curricula.

Policymakers have not entirely ignored the problems of the existing religion curricula. The National Education Commission recently undertook an analysis of grade 6-11 religion textbooks from the perspective of social cohesion. Clearly, the obstacles blocking textbook revisions are not at the policymaking level but at the political level of threatened monks and priests and

devout teachers and parents. These individuals, along with politicians who are afraid of angering their constituents, are the real obstacles to curricular change. Ultimately, the divisions – and at times, suspicion – between Sri Lanka's religious communities will have to weaken before this change is possible.

But although it remains an important dimension of Sri Lanka's political and ethnic problems, religion has not been the greatest point of conflict throughout the country's last fifty years. Indeed, when asked to describe the religious atmosphere of their schools, most principals, teachers and students say that it is amicable and respectful. Of all subjects taught in schools, it is history – with its grand narrative sweep and claims to truth and its political, geographical and religious dimensions – which has been the most connected to Sri Lankan conflict and which continues to be controversial both in and out of classrooms.

History Textbooks in Multi-Cultural Societies

While the government's religion curriculum avoids controversy by isolating each religion, its history curriculum – which does not offer separate Sinhala, Tamil, Muslim and Indian Tamil micro-histories to each student group – has been and continues to be the site of ethnic and political controversy. The content of history textbooks, because it is chosen and implicitly approved by the state, is often a subject of contention in multi-cultural societies. Although textbook controversies are ostensibly about the past, they are actually a result of the political, religious and ethnic concerns of the present. The controversies are therefore fundamentally connected to perceptions, whether accurate or not, of ongoing discrimination and power-relations between ethnic and religious groups.

The most recent history textbook controversy, although an international rather than a domestic conflict, demonstrates this interesting masking of the present. The Japanese government history textbook's description (or lack thereof) of the "Rape of Nanking" in 1937-38 resulted in violent protests throughout China in April 2005, causing the biggest rift between the two countries

in decades. It was clear the protests were as much about a specific historical grievance as they were about the ongoing economic and political rivalry between the countries. But the textbook controversy most analogous to Sri Lanka's is in India, where the recent rewriting of state history textbooks has been directed by the Hindu Right. These new books depict Indian history as the story of the achievements of Hinduism and Hindu civilization since time immemorial, avoid mentioning caste inequality, and cast Islam as "forever alien and inimical to Hindu civilization."² Liberal and secular academics, whose vision of India's past and future differs from the Hindu nationalist vision, continue to protest these textbooks.

Sri Lankan textbooks have not sparked violent Chinese-style protests. But in February 1999 the Ceylon Tamil Teacher's Union protested what they perceived to be the biased content of the seemingly innocuous grade 6 Tamil-medium "Environmental Studies" textbook. The Union arranged a meeting to discuss content changes with the Additional Secretary of the Ministry of Education, but, due to pressure exerted by a group of Buddhist monks, the Additional Secretary cancelled the meeting, ending any chances for revision.

A much more significant and sustained protest against government textbooks has been waged by the LTTE. In early 2004, the Indian magazine *Frontline* described how the LTTE's education wing has produced small books called "Social Studies and History" for grades 6-8. The LTTE, which for years had been distributing these books in the schools they hold, has begun to distribute the books, with teacher's guides, to supplement the government social studies and history curriculum in Jaffna peninsula schools. The LTTE education wing leader has said the books aim at "increasing popular interest in the subject" and countering the "Sinhala-Buddhist bias" in government textbooks.³ The grade 6 book begins with the Tamil Eelam flag and the LTTE "national anthem" and contains a chapter titled "Tamil Eelam and the Freedom Struggle." Given the bizarre administrative arrangement of LTTE-held schools, it should not be surprising that the LTTE

has attempted to provide its own historical vision to students. While LTTE territory is severed from the government politically, militarily and economically, its schools are still – technically – fully within the government's central educational system. School history books, in effect the only government political rhetoric which regularly reaches children in these schools, would obviously pose a threat to the LTTE. That it has begun to distribute the books in government-held schools in the north underscores its loss of popular support among Tamils.⁴

The NEC, in its most recent comprehensive national education policy statement of 2003, echoes its original 1992 report by stating government social sciences curricula must remain relevant by meeting "needs" such as "national identity and harmony...[and] social cohesion."⁵ What follows, then, is a brief analysis of the grade 7-11 "Social Studies and History" textbooks currently in schools from the perspective of those needs.

Sri Lankan History as Sinhala-Buddhist History

The grade 7-11 "Social Studies and History" textbooks contain the only Sri Lankan history the vast majority of students will ever formally study. Given that this history is taught in an educational environment which strongly discourages the development of critical thinking skills, it has even greater potential to do harm by creating or exacerbating ethnic conflict rooted in and justified by the past. But even assuming that students forget everything they learn after leaving school, these textbooks are valuable for what they reveal about the people who write them. Since non-historians – National Institute of Education and zonal education officers – have written them, these textbooks would seem to offer a picture of Sri Lankan history as it is popularly understood.

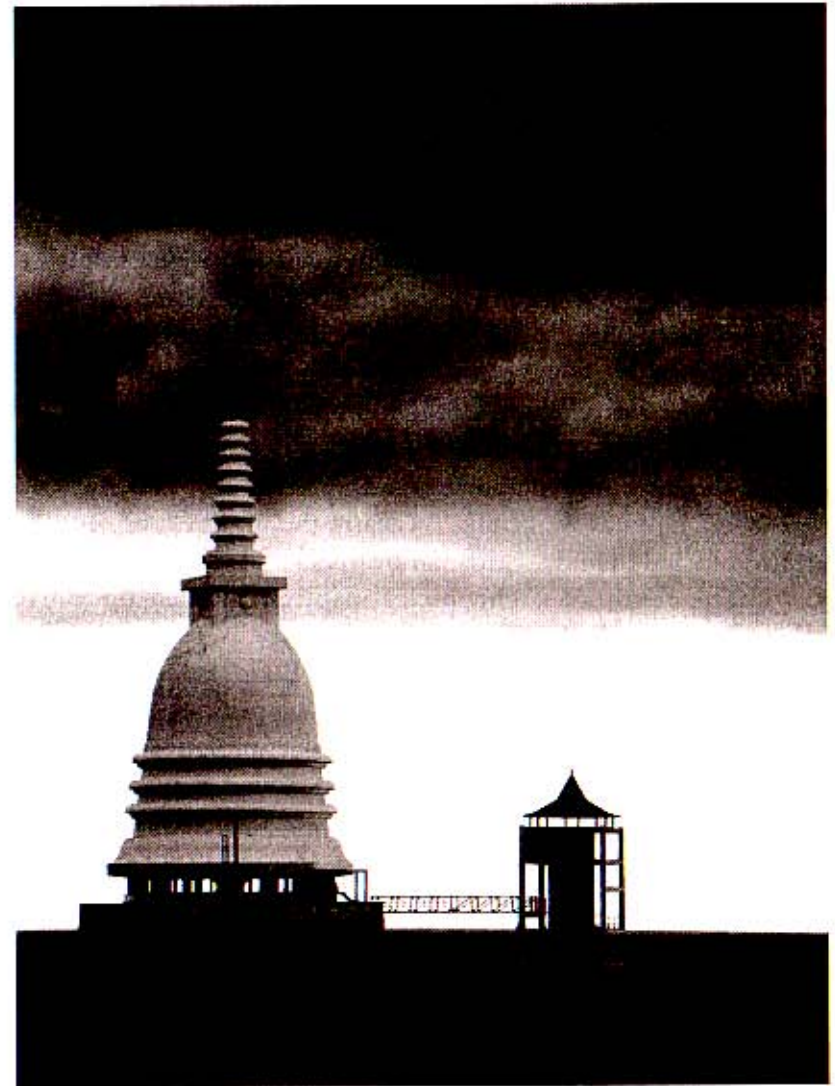
The central tension running throughout the "Social Studies and History" textbooks is the tension which has permeated Sri Lankan politics and society since Independence: the tension between the idea of an exclusive majoritarian Sri Lanka and the idea of an inclusive pluralist Sri Lanka, i.e. a Sinhala-Buddhist

state vs. a secular multicultural state. The textbooks explicitly promote the latter state while implicitly promoting the former. They do this in three interlocking ways: through their racialized vision of history; their portrayal of “Sri Lanka” as an eternal centralized state in which Buddhism is the protagonist religion; and their complete omission of all ethnic and political conflict since Independence.

Together the textbooks, which proceed chronologically by grade from ancient times to the present, subtly connect ancient Vijaya and his migrant Aryan retinue, Buddhism and Sinhalese-ness to assert a timeless Sinhala-Buddhist identity. This identity is presented as the only thread running throughout all of the island’s history. It is unclear exactly how or when “the Aryans” became “the Sinhalese,” but it is obvious the two are synonyms when “the Sinhala kings of Anuradhapura” are suddenly referred to in the grade 8 chapter on the Polonnaruwa Kingdom, despite the fact that “Aryans” are described as the people of the Anuradhapura kingdom in all previous chapters.

An important aspect of these books is that all ethnic and cultural identities are racialized and essentialized. At one point the grade 7 book does offer that “it is possible” to think that the Yakkas and Nagas, thought to be the island’s pre-Aryan “ethnic groups,” mixed with Aryans, and the grade 10 book refers in passing to intermarriages between the Sinhalese and Indian royalty, migrants and invaders. But the general impression given is that “Aryan” (used as a racial rather than linguistic term) – and later Sinhalese, Chola, Tamil and Muslim – are all crisp and unbreakable categories. For example, the textbooks overlook the fact that many Muslims came to the island from South India (and later, Malaysia) when they describe all Muslims as descending from Arab traders. Thus the textbooks portray a past which can only be viewed through static racial and ethnic lenses.

This portrayal has a lot to do with the almost complete reliance of the authors on the “Great Chronicles” - the Mahavamsa, Culavamsa, and Deepavamsa – to write the island’s early history. The main theme and perhaps purpose of the chronicles, begun by



Sri Lankan Buddhist monks beginning around the 6th century, is to make clear that the special mission of “Lanka” and the Sinhalese (via Vijaya) is to guard and protect Buddhism. The problem is not that the textbook writers relied on the chronicles so heavily – indeed, there are no other sources through which to understand the island’s ancient history – but that they accept their Sinhala-Buddhist framework as legitimate and their contents as fact. Thus invasions by faceless South Indians are portrayed by the textbooks as obviously bad, while armies sent from the island to assist South Indian kingdoms or invade ancient Burma are approved uncritically. More troubling, though, is that when Tamils and Hinduism are mentioned it is often in the context of assimilation into Sinhalese kingdoms and culture. But the most egregious evidence of the writers’ Sinhala-Buddhist viewpoint is when in the grade 7 book, describing the introduction of Buddhism by Mahinda in the 3rd century B.C., they write that “Mahinda’s coming to Sri Lanka brought about many revolutionary changes in the lives of our people leading to a cultural awakening.” Clearly, the phrase “our people” does not include Hindu, Christian or Muslim students.

The textbooks’ chronicles-inspired Sinhala-Buddhist framework means that Sri Lanka’s history is told from the perspective of a seemingly eternal Sinhala-Buddhist state floating through space and time. Despite the fact that prior to its conquest by the British the island had rarely been completely politically unified, the textbooks give the overall impression that a Sri Lanka united by Sri Lankans has been the rule throughout history, and that the colonial presence of 450 years was the only major exception to this rule. Perhaps the most subtle way they do this is by describing Anuradapura and Polonnaruwa, along with all of the short-lived south-western kingdoms and Kandy, as the successive “capitols” of Sri Lanka. The deployment of this modern political term creates continuity between the past and present, between the ancient “Sinhalese kingdoms” and today’s state.

The continuity between the ancient Sinhalese past and the contemporary Sri Lankan state is strengthened by the complete omission, aside from a discussion of the 1978 Constitution, of

any post-Independence history and conflict. By not only avoiding discussions of the 1956, 1958, 1977, and 1983 ethnic riots and their causes but ignoring the twenty-year civil war as well, the textbooks - and the government - imply that the ethnic conflicts of the last fifty years are unimportant. In this way Tamils are pushed even further into the margins of Sri Lanka’s history. There is one oblique reference to the war, however, when the grade 11 textbook mentions, in a section discussing “current problems” and terrorism, that Sri Lanka has a refugee problem. This, incredibly, is the closest the history curriculum brings students to the war; the refugee problem is mentioned in a total historical vacuum. One can only imagine how surreal it must be for children throughout Sri Lanka, living in such violent and militarized circumstances, to encounter this textbook.

There are clear efforts a few times throughout the textbooks to inculcate students with an awareness and respect for Sri Lanka’s various ethnic groups and religions. But the textbooks writers’ efforts at stressing multicultural tolerance and Sri Lanka’s pluralistic nature seem token and tacked on – the ultimate impression is that all people were created equal, but the Sinhalese were created more equal than others because they arrived in Sri Lanka first. Thus the Sinhalese appear as more authentically Sri Lankan than other Sri Lankans.

It should be emphasized that the LTTE is not justified in distributing its history “supplements” to schools; its books are clearly LTTE/Eelam propaganda rather than sound history. Also, there is no Sinhala-Buddhist political conspiracy responsible for textbook problems; National Institute of Education (NIE) officers, who design the history curricula, and the textbook writers, all lower-level educational bureaucrats, are simply revealing their biases. But whatever the reason, the fact is that the history textbooks are biased due to their preoccupation with an ancient and idealized Sinhala-Buddhist past and that they remain fuel for separatist ideologues and disaffected Tamils. Even many politically moderate Tamil social studies teachers (independent of the LTTE), annoyed by the lacunae in the history curriculum, say they supplement their classes with more Tamil history. (Sinhalese teachers, not noticing the lacunae, do not do this.)

Given the national goals of ethnic harmony and social cohesion, it is amazing that such a divisive and often inaccurate version of history is offered to Sri Lankan students. At the very least, the history curriculum must be changed in three ways. First, ethnic and religious categories should be complicated and questioned by emphasizing conversions, intermarriages, and the unknown nature of ancient identities; identities must not be given as static. Second, the curriculum should take a fundamentally skeptical stance toward the chronicle sources and make clear their biases. And finally, problems do not go away by being ignored: textbooks must discuss the ethnic and political problems of the last fifty years and explain – but not justify – the long civil war.

The Limitations of Textbooks

It appears the public debate and controversy which has surrounded the history curriculum since the Cease-Fire Agreement may ultimately improve the textbooks. The entire curriculum is now being rewritten by the government in an annual piecemeal fashion, and it will be implemented as a stand-alone subject rather than being subsumed within the amorphous realm of “Social Studies.” The new grade 7 History textbooks were slated to be introduced to schools in late 2005. Also, in 2002 the Educational Publications Department (EPD), the government office in charge of writing textbooks, created a “Respect for Diversity Panel” to inspect both Sinhala and Tamil versions of textbooks before all final drafts are sent to the printer. The EPD says that the panel, comprised of schoolteachers from all ethnic and religious groups, has made real and effective changes to the textbook-writing process.⁶ But no historians are on this panel, although historians are working with the NIE as it designs its new history curriculum. It is very possible that the fundamental problems of the textbooks will remain, but with more tacked-on “Respect Thy Neighbor” rhetoric. Only the coming years will reveal how sincere and effective the government’s handling of its history textbook problem is.

But even if perfectly objective textbooks could be written and distributed to children throughout Sri Lanka, their effects as agents of “National Cohesion” would be nebulous. There is a great difference between curricula and the implementation of curricula. Teachers (and the LTTE) may continue to “supplement” textbooks with their own thoughts, biases and interests. Students may eventually forget most of what they learned in their grade 7-11 history classes. But more fundamentally, the sources which can help to form ethnic or religious stereotypes and divisions are many: family, friends, neighbors, mass media, teachers *and* textbooks. This does not in any way mean that the government should refrain from producing balanced curricula. It is still imperative that it revise its textbooks to avoid perceptions of state-sponsored discrimination. But an awareness of the limited powers of textbooks and the total learning environment of children does help to spotlight the other area in which the government should focus its peace-building efforts: the structure of the educational system. The structure of Sri Lanka’s schools – their widespread segregation by language, religion and ethnicity – presents a far greater obstacle to “National Cohesion” than do textbooks.

Segregated Schools as Societal Stress Fractures

“How can we bring peace to the country when schools are divided by religion?”

-President Chandrika Bandaranaike, December 12th, 2004⁷

The major problem of both Sri Lankan government and newspaper discussions about “National Cohesion” and education is that they never view the segregated structure of schools as itself an integral part of every student’s education. In fact, no one – except President Bandaranaike in a brief speech at a school prize-giving ceremony last December – seems to mention the segregated nature of the school system at all. (As of July 2005, neither President Bandaranaike nor her government had proposed any legislation to alter the system’s structure.) Critics call loudly for “peace lessons” to promote tolerance and ethnic and religious understanding, but

these lessons can accomplish very little in a system which is intrinsically divisive.⁸ In ethnically homogenous areas, changing curricula is the only option; but in diverse areas, structural changes should occur as well. Adults are much more likely to remember that students in their school were either Tamil or Sinhalese or Muslim than they are the contents of their history books or a well-meaning peace curriculum. Put more bluntly, the distance between communalized schools and communal violence would seem to be short.

As of 2003, only 70 of the government's 9,791 schools offered both Sinhala and Tamil as media of instruction. Of these 70 bi-media schools, most are in the Western and Central provinces and only one - a primary school with only 55 students in Trincomalee town - is in the North Central, Northern and Eastern provinces. This means that the provinces which have hosted most of the war's violence essentially maintain a completely segregated school system. This is particularly striking in the East because most Muslim students in Ampara, Batticaloa and Trincomalee districts attend exclusively Muslim schools - meaning that the Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslim of those districts, the most ethnically diverse areas of conflict, tend to attend separate schools. Although Muslim students, who are often from bilingual families, have always been free to choose their medium of instruction, since Independence many Muslim communities and politicians have agitated for and obtained their own schools. Nowhere is this more true than in the East, where the Muslim population is densest. In the rest of the country, where Muslim schools are less common, Muslim students often form small minorities in Sinhalese or Tamil schools.

It is important to note, however, that segregated schools cannot be isolated as a clear source of rising ethnic tensions since Independence because Sri Lanka's school system was linguistically segregated long before the *swabasha* school policies of the 1950s and 1960s. The vast majority of schools during the British-era were "vernacular" schools - that is, Sinhala- or Tamil-medium schools; this was a product of demographics rather than any calculated "divide and rule" colonial policy. But the Sinhala-

Buddhist-backed *swabasha* policies and the creation of Muslim schools further segregated the system and normalized schools which are technically segregated by language but in practice segregated by religion and ethnicity. If segregated schools have not served to aggravate conflict and create negative stereotypes, they have at least sustained them.

The fundamental problem with segregated schools is that children are treated not as autonomous individuals, but rather as members of certain cultural groups. Obviously, Sinhala- and Tamil-speaking students will have to study most subjects in separate classrooms. But that does not mean they should have to study them in separate schools, each with different religious affiliations and sports teams. By separating students in this way, a group's culture is thought to be more secure and thus more likely to be transmitted into the future. But parents and others who fear the loss of segregated schools would mean the erosion of their culture are alarmists. The desegregation of schools, meaning the creation of bi-media schools wherever demographics allow it, would not mean the secularization of students: school shrines and prayer rooms would coexist much as they do now at schools with multi-religious student bodies. The goal of a desegregated school system is the co-existence and integration of ethnic and religious communities within the Sri Lankan polity - not the dismantling and destruction of these communities. Making this distinction clear to concerned parents and religious leaders is the central task awaiting the politician who is brave enough to pursue desegregation. That leader might find it an easier task than expected: most principals and teachers say they support the idea of desegregated schools.⁹

The current communalized school structure leads all too easily to the students and teachers of one school perceiving another school's superior facilities as institutionalized discrimination. This structure, in which students from different schools only meet through athletic competitions and island-wide academic competitions, barely brings students of different ethnicities together. This ensures meager government efforts to encourage

Sinhala/Tamil bilingualism will continue to fail – especially efforts to teach Sinhalese students Tamil. Sinhalese and Tamil students should be learning each others’ languages from a young age in desegregated schools - that is, *from each other* rather than from underpaid and often absent teachers. Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslim students ought to be sharing recesses, playgrounds and English classrooms, forming sports teams and discussing their country’s ethnic problems wherever possible. And most of them want to: when asked in a recent study if they should have the opportunity to study with children of other ethnic groups, 82% of students said “yes.” When asked if they should have the opportunity to discuss ethnic problems with children of other ethnic groups, 77% of students agreed¹⁰.

¹ World Bank, *Treasures of the Education System in Sri Lanka* (2004), pgs. 8, 18-19.

² Nivedita Menon, *History and Truth, History as Truth: The Textbook Controversy in India* (2004), p. 3. Also, K.N. Panikkar, “History Retold,” *Frontline* Vol:20 Issue:11.

³ www.frontlineonnet.com/fl2103/stories.

⁴ Textbooks, of course, are not the only way the LTTE “supplements” government curricula. Forced conscriptions directly from schools, cadre school lectures about the value of Eelam, the screening of war videos and forcing students during school hours to participate in anti-Government protests are ways the LTTE has forced the conflict upon students and their schools.

⁵ NEC, *Envisioning Education for Human Development: Proposals for a National Policy Framework on General Education in Sri Lanka* (2003), xiv.

⁶ Personal communication with Flora Nanayakkara of EPD, 11/2004.

⁷ “President calls for multi-religious schools,” *Daily Mirror*, 2/12/2004.

⁸ “Call for peace lessons in school,” *Daily Mirror*, 28/2/2005.

⁹ This judgment is based on my interviews between November 2004 and June 2005 with dozens of teachers and principals in schools throughout Sri Lanka.

¹⁰ National Education Research and Evaluation Center, *A Qualitative Study of Civic Competencies of Children in Sri Lanka* (2004), pgs. 114-117.

Asians in South American Politics:

The Case of the Fujimori Family in Peru

Rossana Favero-Karunaratna

Between 1821 and 1932, there was a huge flow of immigrants coming from Europe to the New World. United States came first in the list of host countries but little is known of the fact that Brazil and Argentina absorbed a large number of immigrants from Spain and Italy. Most of the immigrants did not have economic resources but came to work and mainly to provide services. Peru also absorbed a significant number of immigrants but lack of proper planning and difficult geographical conditions of its territory motivated some immigrants to decide to continue their journey to nearby countries.

In the case of immigrants from Asia, they were mainly Japanese and Chinese. Brazil and Peru assimilated the highest proportions of Japanese immigrants in the region. The government of Peru signed with Japan a Treaty of Free trade and Navigation in 1873 which opened doors to Japanese immigrants who mainly arrived after 1890s. Their integration in this society represents a never ending phenomenon which has been given prominence especially due to the entrance of Nikkei or Peruvians of Japanese ancestry in politics and to the highest position; for the first time in the history of the world a son of Japanese ancestors became the president of a country.

In Latin America people identify East Asians as “Chinos” (Chinese). All people of Chinese, Japanese, Thai origin and other countries of that part of the world are embraced by that term.

When Alberto Fujimori campaigned to become the President of Peru in 1990, he was commonly called “El Chino”, in relation to

his physical features. He was the son of Japanese immigrants who came to Peru, according to the traditional story regarding his birth, by ship. There was a controversy about his nationality of birth: some state that he was born in Lima while others mentioned that he was really Japanese as he was born of Japanese parents in international waters. The fact is that he was born in Peruvian territory, and registered as Peruvian. His full name is Alberto Kenyo *Fujimori Fujimori* and his date of birth is 28th July (the National Day of Peru) 1938. He is Peruvian by birth and therefore he had the right to contest to become President of the country.

His political rivals then attempted another kind of attack: Alberto Fujimori may be Peruvian but he was *asecond class Peruvian*. That statement generated a lot of protest from many sectors of the population and the majority of the civil society. That discriminatory remark, rejected by everyone, became an element that would finally push him to victory against his main political rival, famous writer Mario Vargas Llosa. Another interesting fact during that campaign is that his Vice President was a businessman turned politician from Cusco (the Capital of the Incan Empire) Maximo San Roman. This kind of partner added a “touch” to his Peruvian identity. Fujimori’s motto: “Honesty, Technology and Work” along with “I am a Peruvian like you” proved to be - and continues to be - very powerful.

Fujimori was later re-elected and even dared to amend the Constitution to contest for a third term which he finally did, becoming the longest serving president in the region only after Fidel Castro, from 1990 to 2000.

One of his political rivals was none other than his estranged wife Susana Higuchi, who was prevented from contesting for presidency due to a legal maneuver prohibiting relatives of the President contesting as candidates. However, she contested and won a seat in the Parliament.

Fujimori after being elected for a third consecutive time finally took refuge in Japan on his way from the APEC Conference when it became known that due to certain actions of his there would be an investigation. He resigned his presidency by sending a fax while taking refuge in Japan. Thus ended his term as President.

Thereafter he applied for Japanese citizenship which was given as both his parents were of Japanese origin. The Government of Japan also argued that his parents registered him as Japanese at the Embassy of Japan and therefore he was Japanese. They considered he represented a great honour for Japan. The debate on his citizenship had a direct effect on the legal procedures filed against him. He has been accused of human rights violations, and malpractices, among other charges. His decision to stay in Japan and the decision of the Japanese Government to entertain the petition had a direct effect on his persona, not only regarding his limited freedom of movement (he is presently under arrest in Chile waiting for his extradition petition to be solved) but the issue of his allegiance to the country and his right to contest for President amidst all these issues. He also married a Japanese lady. Does he continue to be “El Chino”? Incredibly for many, yes and he continues to be extremely popular to a certain extent. Do people perceive him as Peruvian or a Japanese citizen? For many, he is Japanese, not Peruvian anymore, but again for the majority he is the President Peru needs.

An evidence of this is that his eldest daughter Keiko, presently 30 years old (she performed the role of First Lady of Peru in 1994) was elected with the most number of votes to the Parliament in the April 2006 elections. Fujimori’s political party also received a considerable number of seats and has vowed to fight for the clearance of the charges against the former president. Keiko is married to an American citizen who has supported her during the campaign. Fujimori’s second wife too supported and canvassed for Keiko.

What we perceive from the present Presidential elections in Peru is that despite who is sworn as President of the country, Alberto Fujimori continues to be the ideal candidate for the post according to many people. The dichotomy of identities no longer plays a crucial game to determine who is Peruvian or not but again it is the perception of the population that Peruvians have failed - one more time - as political leaders and we need again a Chino (they work hard, they are intelligent).

It is a question of unveiling attitudes and processes not only of assimilation from an individual point of view but acceptance taking into consideration the perceptions and dynamics of the society.

For the Japanese community, the Fujimori experience has been one that generated fear at the beginning and disassociation later. I remember when commenting on the Fujimori phenomena at that time, many members of the Japanese community were very concerned and did not want to associate with it. Some expressed that they were bullied and harassed even to the extent of refusing to serve at some restaurants and discriminated against them. As a consequence they feared retaliation and some of them even left the country. "As a community we were never asked for our opinion. He decided to do it by himself and we do not want anything to do with it".

This attitude may reflect the importance given by the Japanese culture to the community factor. The Japanese government used to promote the visit of relatives in Japan giving to Nisei (children of Japanese born abroad) a one year visa and even later the possibility to seek for employment during their temporal visit. Later, during the Fujimori Government there was a massive flow of Nikkei, Nisei and Sanseis (grandchildren) and then it was calculated that more than 100 people from Brazil and Peru were arriving daily. This created some problems as criminal rings began to fake birth certificates. Media programmes denounced surgical operations

undergone to change the physical appearance of some individuals to enable them to travel easily to Japan. Later, the visa guidelines were reformed in Japan and visas for 3 years were extended even to sanseis.

Presently the Niseis and Sanseis arrive in Japan not only from Brazil and Peru but also from Argentina, Bolivia, Paraguay and Santo Domingo. For them the election of Keiko is also significant, and maybe we can affirm despite who is elected President of Peru this year, the real winner of this election is none other than Keiko Fujimori!

The Sufi's Cave

Sunela Jayawardene

I turned my back on a checkered plane
That slept below
A reckless wind.
And followed a man
Who lived for a God
Muradhi, Muradbia

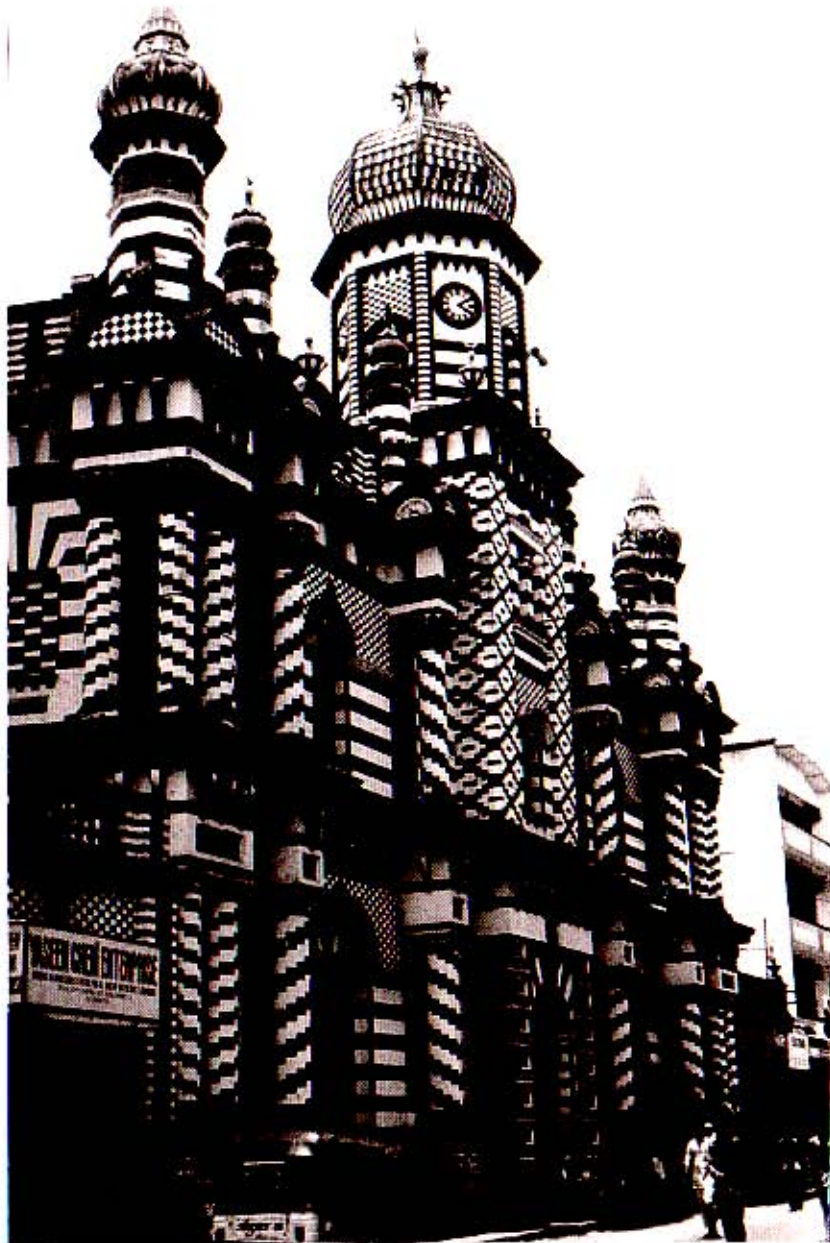
He sought in the depths of these stones.
I stumbled and fell in a lightless place
Yet, he led and I followed
With no reason or thought
Muradhi, Muradbia

As we delved in the bowel
Crawled into stone
Deeper in darkness
Colder and airless
Then...
He showed me a glimmer
Beyond our reach
But
I followed him still
Muradhi, Muradbia

My knees on the rock
Pressed smooth... timeless pilgrims
Who follow a wandering Sage.
Muradhi, Muradbia

Entranced by the intangible
Dangers forgotten
He led and I followed
Muradhi, Muradbia

Till before me he spread
Again the checkered Plain
Below, Below...
The seat of a questing Sage.
Muradhi, Muradbia



Anushka Pereira

The Path to Dafter Jeilani

Sunela Jayawardene

Tortured but mindless
Twisting towards a light
Straining to move higher
Beating out the rhythm
Closer and faster
The pain a confirmation
A promise to see a God
An effort to become one
Above and beyond
To the plane of Indifference....
If you want to take that path,
Tell the Bawas!

Shame of the Pig

Asitha Ameresekere

She started coming into the restaurant about three months ago. The first time she didn't buy anything. She just stared through the glass at the patisseries and eyed each one with such scrutiny that they seemed to tremble. Then she left without a word. Of course Francisco took this as a personal insult since there had never been a man, woman or child who had looked at his patisseries and not purchased one. Not in twelve years of baking. But when he told the waiters about the impertinent young lady, they just laughed and continued for a good while until Francisco started describing her to them. Then they were silent for a good while, each carefully constructing a jigsaw of the woman's face, and as Francisco went further, her body. They were still silent after he had finished. Then Pedro said:

"A goddess came into the shop and I didn't even know."

The others nodded.

"So, only a goddess would turn down one of my babies," Francisco added. They nodded again and the baker felt redeemed. As he walked to the kitchen, Pedro piped:

"Wait till Mister Joseph hears a goddess came into his shop today."

Caballe's Bakery and Restaurant of Fine Cuisine enjoyed the reputation of being the oldest and most prestigious eating-house in Sorrento. Joseph's great-grandfather first baked the bread his wife Carlotta kneaded there, as did his son after him. It was only in the third generation that the young Franco Caballe found himself being flung against the sidewall during an obligatory brawl at a family wedding reception in the bakery and went straight through to the abandoned shop adjacent to it. The men spent the next hour throwing themselves into the remainder of the wall as a testament to their manhood till it became too painful and the women had to complete the job. Franco immediately saw the

potential of the extension, bought the adjacent shop, ordered some chairs and the restaurant was born. The edges of the wall still remained and Joseph decided to keep them as a monument to his father's entrepreneurship. He however introduced the kitchen, employed five more staff and concentrated on his passion: pushing the frontiers of fine cuisine. His many apprenticeships in Rome only made him hunger even more for the secret to truly excellent food preparation. It was in his blood, he kept telling his despairing mother when she brought up marriage and her God-given right to be a grandmother. There was no room for any emotional distractions.

"...And mushrooms from Senora Adriana. The good ones are not on display, so you tell her they're for me. Have you got all that?" Joseph tried to read the scrawl Pedro was producing on the several pieces of notepaper.

"Yes, yes, Mister Joseph, mushrooms... Senora Adriana."

"Let me see."

Pedro looked at his boss, smoothed the paper down as if it were something very dear to him, and handed it over. It was strange to see the writing of a child coming from a grown man but Joseph was impressed. If the Spaniard was to be a waiter at his establishment at the age of thirty-two, then he had to learn to read and write. The fact that a list of ten items of food spread over three pieces of paper was inconsequential. Only a week before it was five pieces. Joseph could feel Pedro squirm in the silence like a schoolboy as he read through the list.

"Good." And he handed it back to him. "Anything else?"

Pedro folded the list which had now become even more precious to him, shaking his head, then exclaimed:

"Yes! Yesterday, a woman came to the shop, Mister Joseph."

"They are allowed."

"But she was a goddess, sir."

"We don't discriminate, Pedro," he said, changing the ink in his pen. A drop fell to his desk but was wiped out almost before it landed.

“She looked at Francisco’s cakes for half an hour.” He leaned forward. “Then she went without buying *anything*.”

Joseph put down the pen and stared at his waiter.

“Anything?”

“Si,” Pedro confirmed.

Joseph shook his head as he walked to the door.

“I don’t know what to say. I’ll think about this very carefully though.” He opened the door. “Now get the food before it all goes.”

The second time the goddess came into the restaurant, no one was manning the patisserie. Francisco was frantically pressing garlic for thirty-six rounds of bread for the minister’s birthday table, and the rest of the staff were fighting to take orders from the large-breasted women imported from Naples who made up the majority of the party. Joseph had partially closed the restaurant for the minister, only allowing couples in, as was usual for parties over twenty. He peered at the enormous mass of a man from the bar and wondered what attributes he had to secure himself a seat in parliament. The minister turned and raised a fat paw his way. Joseph nodded and noticed his other paw was gently stroking the thigh of the brunette beside him. The minister’s wife was nowhere in sight. Joseph had to turn away. It was then that he saw the goddess by the patisserie.

Tall, silent and cloaked from shoulder to ankle in a black shawl, she seemed almost out of place in the frenetic world of pasta and chatter that surrounded her. A finger with a perfectly carved nail slid slowly across the glass, stopping at each delicacy. Without taking his eyes from her, Joseph moved behind the patisserie. Each step revealed more of her face until he stood before her, and all things came to a halt.

“It would be an honour to help you choose something this time, signora,” he said.

She smiled and looked up.

“I don’t want anything with butter,” she said.

“Ah. A difficult request,” he said lifting the glass panel, “But not impossible.” He produced a small bun laced with cherries and aniseed. “Would you like to taste first?”

“No. I’ll take it.”

As Joseph packaged the bun he felt her eyes on him. It was warm and made him blush. For the first time he found it a task to wrap up a single bun.

“How much do I owe you?” she asked, suddenly holding a purse.

“A return visit would be payment enough, signora.” A drop of red lit the goddess’s cheeks up for a moment.

“Very well. Thank you.” And she left. Joseph watched her cross the street, hoping for a glance back, but there was none. He stroked his moustache and realised his hand was trembling.

“Mister Joseph, the veal is off. The veal is off and there are three orders, Mister Joseph.” Pedro had appeared from nowhere.

“Ask Emanuele to send some,” he said with eyes still fixed on the street. “And put four more bottles on their table with my compliments while they wait. And Pedro, tell Emanuele the veal is for me, not the minister.”

The evening was coming to an end for the minister, now plump and sleepy with veal and wine, surrounded by only a handful of his troupe. Most had paired off with the imported women and left to enjoy the remainder of the night in the rooms for hire at the bottom of the street. The brunette still lingered though, carving her name into her tiramisu with a steak knife. In his seat opposite her, Joseph watched in pain till the minister leaned over and whispered:

“You intrigue me, Joseph. Shall I tell you why?”

“If you must, minister.”

“I must, Joseph, I must. You are a man in a fortunate position. You have the finest restaurant in Tuscany, some wealth, even some looks. In fact, you remind me of myself in my youth.”

“Such compliments should not be thrown so easily at the likes of me, minister.”

“I speak the truth, Joseph, as always. But in all the years I’ve come here, I have never seen you with a woman.” He dipped a finger in his wine and licked it. “You are Italian, yes?”

“Since I was born, minister.”

"Yes, yes of course. You understand, there are so many foreigners now. So, what is the problem, my friend? Speak to me."

"My work is my passion."

"Yes, but garlic and pesto cannot love you back, Joseph. Ah, if only it would." He glanced at the brunette. "You like her?" Joseph forced himself to look.

"As always, you have excellent taste, minister."

"Hmm. And one of these days I'll show you my wife. As for this one, she's yours if you wish. Perhaps it would help if you looked at her as... as the raw ingredients for the sauce you always dreamed of simmering, yes? A suggestion, nothing more."

"I have to be up early tomorrow but thank you for your thoughtfulness, minister."

The minister sat back and nodded.

"The men I trust, Joseph, all have healthy appetites, for everything. You, my friend, are the exception. But sometimes I like to be reassured." When he looked back at Joseph, the effects of the wine were no longer visible.

A week later, the goddess returned. It was an early Sunday evening and Joseph had closed the restaurant. Francisco, the last to leave, was sweeping the kitchen while his boss worked out the wages with a glass of wine, punctuated by glances through the window. She appeared at the door, saw Joseph, raised her hand to knock, then lowered it. Joseph saw her leaving and almost toppled his wine over in his haste to catch her. He caught her outside Emanuele's shop.

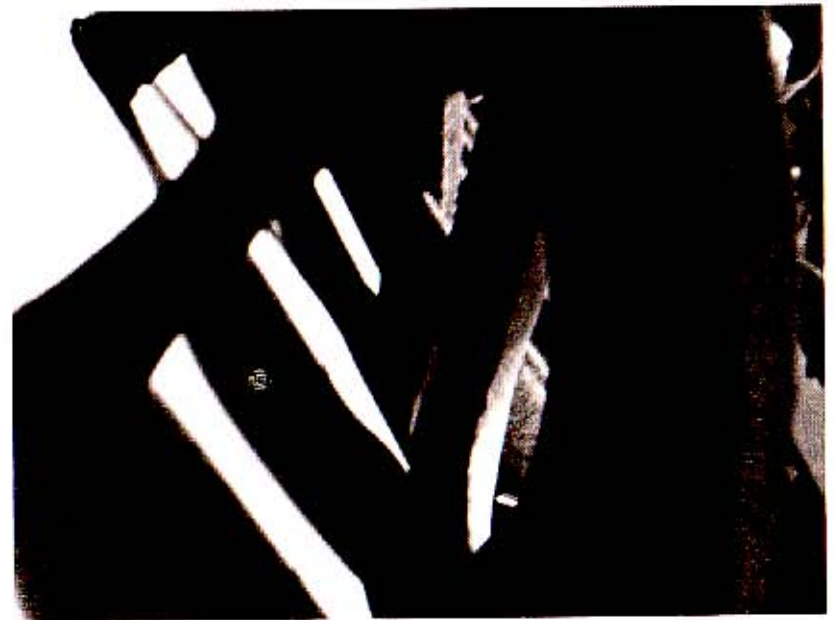
"Signora. I saw you outside."

"I saw you. But you were closed."

"We are always open for special customers." He motioned an invitation and she accepted. As they walked back he asked her if she'd enjoyed the bun. She said she had.

Once inside, Joseph seated his guest and slipped into the kitchen. He emerged with a glass.

"No, thank you," she said when he offered her the wine. Her name was Isabella and she lived alone in the Latin Quarter. She was an orphan and worked in the flower shop by the bridge.



Sometimes she would go to restaurants in the neighbouring districts and sell roses, but had been warned that the proprietor of Caballe's did not take kindly to flower peddlers. Joseph laughed at this comment and once again felt her eyes on him. It was when they were talking about how to make buns without butter that Francisco arrived and served Isabella with a bun, bowed and left.

"I thought you might be hungry," said Joseph quietly.

"No. Thank you. But perhaps I'll take it home."

They talked till dusk, watched the street lamps flicker to life and the passers-by gradually glow in the yellow light. When Isabella yawned Joseph offered to walk her home but she declined and left with her bun.

The next three months were extremely busy for the staff of the restaurant. Joseph, however, hardly noticed. He would leave Pedro to supervise the cleaning after closing up, Francisco to settle the till, and meet Isabella at the flower shop by the bridge for the evening. They would walk along the river, find special spots that they both liked and would mark them with twigs, then return to see if they were still there the next day. He would bring her butterless buns that she would always take home to eat. Their conversations covered almost every topic and one flowed effortlessly into the next. Each picked up words that the other would use and make them their own. And every so often, their fingers would meet and lock, if only for a moment. Soon, Joseph had no doubt in his mind.

After the provincial elections, the large minister threw another dinner party at Caballe's for all his friends to celebrate his success. More imported ladies from Naples arrived as well as many figures of state. Joseph was in a particularly excellent frame of mind and his witty quips and sincere geniality stirred the pulses of many of his female guests. The minister was visibly impressed and would bellow praises at Joseph at key moments during the evening, repeatedly pledging his allegiance to the restaurant and insisting that the government would crumble without Caballe's.

When the evening had come to an end and the minister stumbled out with a half-smoked cigar and a different brunette,

Joseph closed the restaurant, gathered the staff together and announced that Isabella had agreed to be his wife.

"The goddess is going to be your wife?" cried Pedro. "Does that mean that you will be... a god, Mister Joseph?"

"No," replied Joseph, then added, "I wanted you all to know first."

They all cheered and tried to shake their employer's hand simultaneously. Pedro embraced his boss with a strength Joseph never thought he had and then kissed him on both cheeks. Francisco produced a dusty bottle of champagne and popped the cork, spraying the groom as liberally as possible, swearing to clean up afterwards. Joseph was overwhelmed by the elation of his friends and suddenly realised he was at home, with his family.

Joseph had some difficulty carrying his bride over the threshold of the restaurant since the doorway was so narrow. He set her down, looked around and asked her to open her eyes. What lay before the couple was a restaurant transformed. Candles lit the entire space, what seemed like hundreds of them, scattered on the floor, on holders, suspended from the ceiling and all ivory white. In the centre of the room was a single table with a white cloth and ivy winding around the legs. The places were set for two. Isabella could not speak for some time.

"Would you like to have dinner with me?" asked Joseph. His wife clasped his hand nervously and nodded.

"Good. Because tonight, for the whole night, for as long as it lasts, we will eat and drink. I want the things that matter most to me in this world to meet."

They sat and Joseph poured the wine.

"Joseph, I must tell you something."

"So must I," said Joseph raising his glass. "Thank you for buying your buns from me, and saying yes to me, and for being born. I thought there was nothing more sweet than the taste of a wine sauce or the look of someone first tasting food I had made with my own hands until I saw you. To our life."

They drank. Isabella slurped and the wine splashed onto her white dress. Joseph immediately attended to her as she looked at him. Her eyes were beginning to water.

"I'm sorry, I'm sorry," she whispered as he mopped the wine up. "Joseph..."

"No, sweetheart, no apologies. You are nervous. If a woman were not nervous hours after getting married, *that* would be strange. Now," he said placing the fish starter before her, "Let us eat."

Joseph sliced through the flesh then stopped and looked up. Isabella was staring at her plate with an expression he had not seen before.

"What is wrong, Bella? Are you ill? You haven't eaten all day. You must be famished. Please. Eat something. I guarantee you feel..."

Isabella's face suddenly launched itself into the fish, her teeth savagely attacking the meal, her tongue spitting out bones, her nose flicking the skin to one side. And the noises, the crunches, the snorts! Parts of fish flew onto the table, the floor, sizzling on the candles, staining the wedding dress. He could not believe what he was seeing. He started chuckling, thinking it was some sort of joke she had been waiting to play on him. But when her face finally emerged from the now clean plate, he saw behind the fish-stained hair, streams of tears from his wife's eyes.

"I don't understand," he said.

"I cannot eat in any other way. I cannot help it. And now you know. You know what you have married. An animal."

Joseph stared, numb. He was watching himself walk to her and embrace her so tightly that all the tears she had inside her poured out, extinguishing all the candles, so they were in darkness, and it seemed as though the last few minutes had not happened. But he did get up and walk to her and held her as she cried. And they eventually fell asleep, there on the floor, with the candles still lit.

As the weeks went by, the news of Joseph's quiet marriage spread through the town. The large minister came in personally to congratulate him and give him the date of his next dinner party.

"A small gathering, perhaps forty to fifty of my closest friends, no more. And of course the opportunity for you to present your bride to us. You don't know how happy I am to see you've taken my

advice, Joseph. A wise choice, my friend. Very wise. And wonderful, of course. That goes without saying. But very good for you too. In so many ways. You understand, of course, yes?"

Joseph nodded, smiling through his teeth.

Preparations for the dinner began early. The staff bustled around the dining area while pleasant aromas drifted through from the kitchen clashing with the banging of crockery. Francisco shouted orders to Pedro. Pedro translated them and shouted orders to the staff below him. It was a scene Joseph had grown up with and one he loved. The berserk before the battle, his father had always called it. And yet the picture was not quite perfect. He looked at the edges of the half-broken wall and remembered climbing the bricks as a child. Suddenly he saw in flashes piglets running amok around them.

The night before the minister's gathering, as they lay in bed in Joseph's small apartment above the restaurant, Isabella leaned over and faced her husband who was staring at the ceiling.

"Tell them I am sick."

"No."

"It would be better, my love."

"No." But in his heart he knew it would be better.

"Please. I don't ask for much, but this I am asking you to do for me. For your business. I know the things that are close to you."

Joseph looked at her.

"I know you are worried. And I cannot be the cause," she said. Joseph clasped her hand.

"Are you sure?"

She smiled, tightened her grip, then let go and looked away to hide her eyes. And Joseph knew he had hurt her more than is humanly possible.

Neither of them slept that night. And the next day not a single word was exchanged between them.

The dinner had begun. There was the usual flurry of heads and ladies and the aroma of garlic and wax permeated the air while the minister chattered as if everyone in the room was deaf. Pedro

led the waiters in taking the endless orders for meat and fish and bread and wine while Francisco cursed as he created dishes in minutes in the kitchen, fighting his way through the smoke and steam. Joseph sat by the minister quietly, the seat beside him empty. He glanced at the steps leading to his apartment as the minister babbled on about his new reforms.

“So,” said the minister, pausing when he sensed Joseph’s indifference. “Where is your wife?”

Joseph swallowed a little then took a sip of wine to think. He placed the glass down slowly and wiped his mouth with his napkin. Then he folded his napkin and placed it on the table. Then unfolded it and tucked it back under his neck. Then he turned to look at his guest’s eyes.

“She is sick. She sends her apologies, minister.”

“It seems she is well enough to deliver them in person.”

Joseph followed the minister’s gaze to the steps Isabella was descending in a simple, pure white dress of fine cotton. The chattering died down as she approached the table and halted by her husband.

“May I present Isabella, my wife,” said Joseph.

The minister shot up and kissed the woman several times on the cheeks, then led her to her seat, praising her beauty and slapping Joseph on the back. The chattering resumed, even more heatedly now, and the minister’s attention was exclusively focused on the new arrival, pausing only to whisper to Joseph:

“Your taste is impeccable, my friend. Impeccable,” he said, stressing each syllable in the word.

Pedro brought the first course - soup - to the table.

“And what a wit! She could spar with the President! Impeccable, Joseph! I cannot fault her!”

The guests raised their spoons and fumbled with their napkins.

“Now there are two reasons why the government would crumble without Caballe’s, yes? You know I speak the truth.”

Everyone started eating. Then one by one, stopped. And stared. Even the minister. All except for Joseph and Isabella, their

faces in their bowls, slurping their way through the fresh tomato and finding their way to the bottom, closing their eyes and noses, and not emerging till every drop had been licked away, their faces now stained dark orange and remnants of basil and oregano hanging from the extremities.

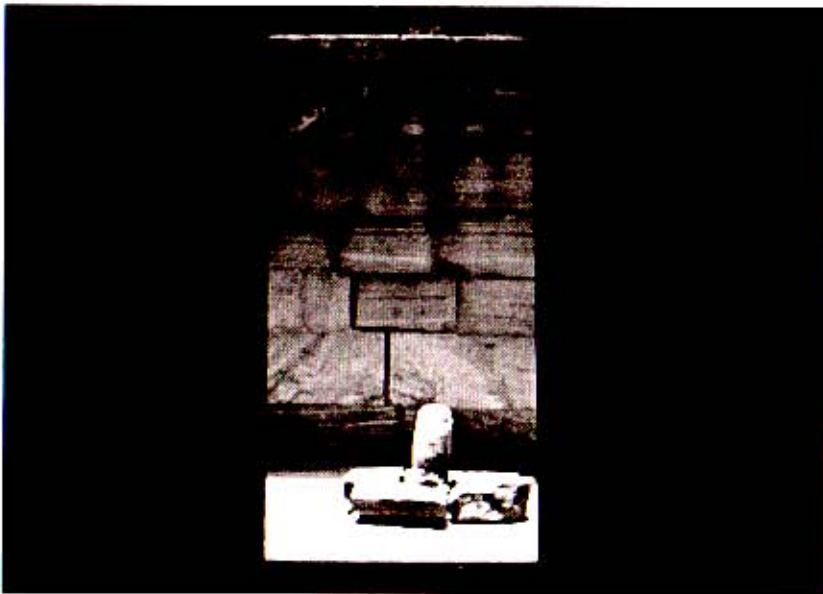
There was silence for some time. Then Joseph, wiping his face with his napkin, said:

“Please, it is best eaten hot. We don’t mind waiting.”

Someone who frequently disappears

John Mateer

As if he wasn't waiting for me he was, on Armenian Street
 in the kopitiam, rising from a circle of familiars,
 gliding towards me like the Orang Laut
 for whom he once waited on a beach in Riau year-long
 until that one dawn. Extending his hand, we greet like Malays
 everywhere;
 he a nomad, I an exile, both of us friends in a poem by Rumi.
 And we speak of histories before the city-state,
 of Araki who sees women in bondage as yellow hybrid orchids
 splattered with red,
 until we stroll through the steamy night to the bus stop
 and I depart like a sea-gypsy, sailing high in the front window of
 the double-decker bus,
 watching far below the rain-slicked streets parting like waves,
 darkly.



Anushka Pereira

From the novel **Nurma's Daughters***Yoo Jae-Hyun**Stanley's Story*

The rainy season, July, Hong Kong Island, Stanley (Chek Chue) Peninsula. In Tung Tau Wan the always heavy, moisture-soaked and hot wind blew languidly. The first place the bay wind hit was the barbed wire and six meter walls of Chek Chue Prison, constructed in 1937 and unchanged since then. After the wind climbed up the walls and glanced over them for a moment, it sprinkled raindrops along the Tung Tau Wan Road and swept up the leafy Ma Hang Hill. Turning into a mountain wind as it crossed a narrow strait to the Kowloon Peninsula, the continent's tip, it scattered.

The Tung Tau Wan sky was filled with ashen clouds risen from the bay. Since morning the rain was constant, neither stopping nor thickening, making the concrete yard and the roofs of rows of the prison buildings inside the 200 x 400 meter enclosure unpleasantly wet.

A Korean, Park, was greeting noon as the morning shift ended in the workshop of Building 7-A (CAT-A), Unit 5 in Chek Chue Prison .

A Chinese, Wong carried sheaves of paper from his workbench, and grumbled over his shoulder to Park, who was hole-punching books at a drilling machine. He said, "Shitty weather. It's always like this around this time". Park wiped his face, lifting his hand from a lever, and sweaty particles of paper dust rushed into his mouth.

The workshop for Unit 5 workshop was set up for bookbinding. In the outside world, thin sheaves of paper were not bound mechanically, and so the pages had to be manually arranged, perforated with a drill, and bound. Four months ago, immediately after his transfer to Chek Chue Prison from his cell in Lai Chi

Kok, Park was in charge of cleaning, but now he was responsible for drilling. 28 of the 31 prisoners in Unit 5 spent four hours a day at the workshop. But because their daily work load took less than two hours, nobody had to hurry and so no one did. The two prison guards who were also stuck in the workshop were indifferent to the prisoner's work, and only interested in accidents. Still, Park felt lucky he could at least work. For the ten month he had spent in Lai Chi Kok, all he did was go back and forth from his cell to the dining hall to the tiny playground, or appear in court. That he had things to do everyday was about a hundred times better than doing nothing. If he hadn't had this work, he might have gone crazy.

In court, when the Korean translator murmured that a twenty year sentence had been issued, Park's hair rose; still, he was incredulous. He would have felt the same way had the sentence been ten or thirty years. Then the thought of twenty years in prison began to tighten his chest as he imagined the accumulation of long days. The day finally came, a week after his transfer to Chek Chue, when his eyes grew hot and he burst into tears. Despite the rule that well-behaved inmates could get a third of their sentences remitted, the thought of spending thirteen years in a strange and foreign prison pushed him into a world of desperation.

Whenever he thought of his thirteen year sentence he felt faint, but now after spending four months at Stanley he felt much better. Above all, his sentence in CAT-A in Chek Chue Prison was considerably shorter than those of the others.

Wong, the Chinese from Room 2, said "You can get out of here and still see the world before you turn fifty". In his late forties, Wong, with big bright eyes, fine double eyelids, and a round, fair face, still had twenty years of his sentence to serve. It might have been because Park's room, Room 3, was right next to his, but Wong had always been kind to Park because they were in the same department. The prisoners of CAT-A were in one of three departments: Murder, Drugs, or Rape. Wong from Shandong Province left his hometown when he was in his twenties, and settled in Hong Kong. It seemed that he had had a hand in heroin

production, and was captured five years ago and sentenced to 25 years.

This is how Wong described production.

“It’s complicated. I diluted 100% heroin in cold medicine to make it 50% pure. That was my job. And, um, sometimes I used painkillers or tranquilizers, instead”.

“That’s production?”

“Ho-ho. Not everybody can do this. Who’s going to pay a lot for 50% heroin? If it isn’t 100% pure, it should look at least 70 to 80% pure. That’s the essence of my skill. Even people who tasted my work, didn’t think it was 50% heroin.”

People like Wong were called DD (Dangerous Drug), after their crime. The Korean, Park, was also a DD, but if there was a difference between the two, it was that Wong was a so-called Heroin Major from Production University, while Park had attended The University of Delivery.

“What was your major?”

“My major?”

“I mean, what did you mostly deal in?”

“People say... it’s ice.”

“Ah, ice.”

Park, the Ice Major from The University of Delivery, was captured and hooded by the Hong Kong police at Chek Lap Kok Airport, six months after he had begun his ice deliveries. It had been his fourth business trip. At the police interrogation, Park insisted on his ignorance. The drug, ice, had been stored inside an exceptionally large ginseng tea box. In fact, right from the beginning, no one had ever told him what was inside. Even President Kim, who had offered him the job of delivering goods from Shenzhen to the US territory of Guam, never once mentioned the contents of the ginseng tea box. But there was nothing but drugs that could have fetched KRW 10,000,000 for the price of delivering two boxes. Park had not been unaware of this.

All because of money.

Whenever he thought about the money he had received as payment for delivering the drugs, Park let out a long sigh. He had planned

on quitting once he snatched KRW 50,000,000. During South Korea’s IMF Economic Bailout, after Park had been fired from the factory he had worked at for 16 years without a hitch, he opened a kim-bap restaurant with a loan he had obtained using his severance pay and apartment deposit as securities. After having to give up the this business completely, he looked for jobs at construction sites for a year, but it had been hard to eke out a living, not to mention pay tuition for his growing children.

It had been five years since he first left for Bangkok*, also known as “Utterly Stuck in the Room”, taking an airplane for the first time in his life, after having heard from a high school classmate by chance that a person in Bangkok was looking to hire someone. He let his wife and two children stay at his parents’ house in Gong-Ju. The person in Bangkok engaged in the tourist business or something, didn’t give him any money, and ordered him to do all kinds of chores. After a year, he came to know enough about Bangkok that he spent his own money to guide tourists from Seoul, but it was not a job he could make money from. It was hard to send KRW 300,000 a month to his wife. To make matters worse, his wife, who looked as though she’d born to be healthy, had been suddenly diagnosed with gastric cancer. Frantically running here and there to borrow money, he boarded a plane to return, but Park was speechless when he saw his wife lying in bed in the shabby general hospital with a dark, gaunt face and vacant eyes. He took the price of a plane ticket from the KRW 2,000,000 in his pocket, and put the rest of the money in his wife’s hand. Park returned to Bangkok. Since he had spent almost five years in Bangkok, if he had anything to do, he had to do it there. After desperately searching for a job he had heard about in a bar, he finally met that person, President Kim.

“So, you want to make money?”

It was questionable what he had been involved in, but that person, President Kim, with the sunken eyes and projecting cheek bones,

* This is a pun on ‘Bangkok’: Bang in Korean meaning ‘room’ and kok ‘utterly’. This is followed by the word ‘stuck’ to complete the pun.

shook Park's hand. He introduced himself as a Korean-American from L.A, but whether he was a Korean-American or a Korean-African didn't matter to Park. The work was simple and everything including airfare and accommodations would be paid for. Park would have to go to Hong Kong; then go to Shenzhen, where he would meet someone who would receive something; and then go to Guam to deliver it.

"How much will you pay me?" he asked clenching his teeth, staring into President Kim's hollow eyes and indifferent face. The haggard face of his wife seemed to overlay President Kim's.

"Give me your bank account number. I'll transfer KRW 10,000,000 into your account when you're done in Guam."

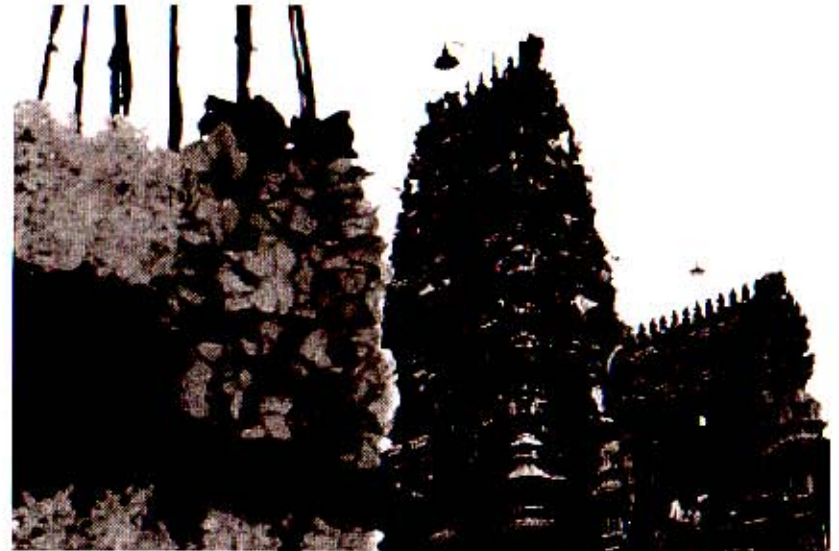
"KRW 10,000,000."

Park blushed and felt as though the wind had been knocked out of him.

"Let's do it," he said.

He quietly wrote his bank account number into the notepad President Kim held out to him. Two weeks later, Park took two boxes someone had given him in a hotel in Shenzhen, and then went to Hong Kong to catch a plane for Guam. After arriving in Guam, he waited in the hotel President Kim had told him to stay, and as expected, the following day someone came and took the boxes. The next morning at an international phone in his hotel, Park confirmed the money he had received. He checked his bank account three times and not a single Won of the KRW 10,000,000 was missing. This is how it started.

Nothing worrisome happened the second or third time. On the fourth he had decided that after his current job he would only do one more. After checking in at Chek Lap Kok Airport, Park walked to a corner coffee shop, thinking to kill time. Three or four people seemed to approach him. Two of them suddenly forced his hands behind his back and another pulled something black over his head. His legs went limp. Even if the black hood had not been put over Park, he still would have only seen darkness.



After a two day interrogation at a police station, he had been imprisoned in a cell where a Thai had told him, "Someone blew the whistle."

"But there's no reason."

"Come on, baldy. Use your brain. You were caught before departure. That means they already knew everything and were only waiting for you. It's not rare, you know."

The man was right in the end. While Park had been unaware of this during his interrogation at police headquarters, later in court, the police report revealed that the police had been waiting for him with advance information.

Gnashing his teeth, Park said, "I'll rip that fucking bastard's eyes out when I get out of here." But Wong, the Heroin major from Production University currently in the DD department thought differently.

"President Kim wouldn't have said anything."

"What?"

"That kind of thing comes with the territory. I'm not sure about this President Kim, but nine out of ten times it's the delivery people who do that kind of thing."

"The delivery people?"

"A trail begins when your friend, President Kim, even receives the goods."

"..."

Park's head was about to burst. "But, why? Why would they do that?"

"You see, they've learned to help each other to survive. If police can raise their efficiency ratings, dealers can keep doing business. Over a third of the DDs here are in the same boat as you."

Wong patted Park's shoulder. "Forget it. It's done no use thinking about it. You were just unlucky. You can't do anything about it now, but after a year, you're bound to feel better."

Park gnashed his teeth at his nameless informant, but like Wong said, it was no use nothing could change. Everything had already happened.

The noon bell rang, morning work was over. Park turned off the switch of the drilling machine and wiped sweat from his forehead. His work clothes were soaked, and so wrapped tightly around his shoulders and thighs. At the long line of showerheads beside the entrance of the workshop, five or six men were already shoving their heads beneath the running water. Park got out of his work clothes and stood under a vacant showerhead. The stream was weak and lukewarm, but at least he could wash off the layers of sweat that were stuck to his body. Next to him the man from Room 12, a Vietnamese named Dinh, babbled to himself as he scrubbed his groin. Since the man spoke to himself in Vietnamese, Park couldn't understand what he was saying. He was a young guy imprisoned at the age of fifteen and had already rotted in prison for ten years with 22 still remaining. His crime was murder. And though first serving a life sentence, at the hearings of his last appeal his sentence was reduced to thirty-two years. The DD and Murder Department people usually did not mix, but in this guy's case, things were different. Unlike the other murderers, he didn't smell of blood.

"I remember stabbing someone, but I don't remember why. I didn't know who he was and I can't even remember his face. I drank a lot of beer that night."

The guy had said it sincerely. And looking in his eyes, maybe it was true. At such a young age as fourteen, it was possible to do something so reckless. But Wong thought differently.

"He didn't know who he'd killed? Of course he didn't. The TRIAD gang had probably thrown a little money at him with orders to do the job, so he probably really didn't know who he'd killed. But he shouldn't keep saying he didn't know. At his last appeal he probably sang like a canary."

"So, who did he?"

"I heard the victim was from Hanoi. Maybe he did something to annoy the TRIAD"

Park clucked his tongue in disapproval. "The only thing that kid ever did in Hong Kong was stab someone from his own country."

After having showered and dressed, Park walked from the locker room slowly as the two prison guards left their office for roll call. Andy, slightly over twenty and not yet accustomed to being a prison guard, walked as though he were a puppet, his shoulders stiff and an arm band wrapped tightly around his arm. The other guard, with the black muster in his right hand, was as old as Wong. He wore black-rimmed glasses and dragged his feet as sluggishly as the prisoners. What set him apart from them, however, was that he thrust out his jaw when he walked, and cast his eyes in all directions. People said a twenty centimeter long knife scar ran down his right shoulder, but it couldn't be seen so long as he wore his khaki uniform. Rumor had it that one of the prisoners had once pounced on him, leaving the scar, but still, he had never become brutal with the prisoners of Unit 5. He neither swore nor raised his voice with them. Peeking through the office windows, Park always could always see him reading some book. But the books weren't so good. When Park had once been called into the office, he finally had a chance to see the titles scattered on the desk. During this instance, the titles he saw were *The Treatment of Venereal Disease* and *A National Study on the Sexual Intercourse of College Students in the Past Ten Years*. Since he could read some Chinese, Park wasn't unacquainted with the words "venereal" or "sexual intercourse."

Before 12:30, as usual, 28 prisoners stood loosely in line in front of the exit of the workshop. Roll was called by having prisoners raise their hands when their names were called. Because the only way out of the workshop was through a heavy steel door that led to the cells, it was impossible for people to go missing. After roll, the young guard opened the steel door. As they walked in line, the prisoners were given simple searches. Though done twice a day, they were done fairly meticulously. Carrying a tool out of the workshop was bad. Outside of the workshop was another other steel door. Prisoners waited until everyone gathered in front of it. The guards then opened this steel door. Eight concrete pillars towered over Unit 5's two floors, with 31 cells lining both its sides.

Cell doors did not open until each prisoner stood in front of his cell.

Before the doors opened, Wong held out a cigarette to Park. He silently accepted the cigarette from Wong and lowered his head. At the bottom of his steel door he looked at his food slot. Fixing his eyes on it, he again used his palm to wipe the sweat off his forehead and shook it. Sweat speckled the cement floor. He had just showered, but it had been useless. Sweat from all over his body drenched the purple prison uniform he had only just changed into. The steel door clattered opened. Before entering his cell, Park saw the stainless steel bars of a window across his cell below the ceiling. Between the bars a tiny sky thick with clouds could be seen. It was still the sky of Hong Kong. He lowered his head as he stepped into Room 3. After setting down the cigarette he had received from Wong on the small triangular table below his window, he removed his top to wash his face and chest at the sink beside the steel door and sat on his bed, which was beside the table. He lifted the cigarette from the table to his mouth, and bit it before lighting up. After gathering the strong bitter smoke in his mouth, he pushed it deep into his lungs and held it there for a while. Again, sweat streamed down his body. Before pushing the smoke back up his throat in a long exhalation, he carefully pressed out the embers on the cigarette's tip. Until the plastic lunch tray had passed through his food slot, Park sat idly at the edge of the bed, once suddenly hesitating to drag on his cigarette before giving up. Unlike at his first prison, because prisoners could not receive packages in Chek Chue, cigarettes were rare. As payment for his four hours of labor in the workshop, he was paid 150 HKD a months, but using them could only get him three packs of cigarettes. It was said that salaries increased in small increments. After a month or two, he would receive about 300 HKD a month. On his current wage he could afford to buy chocolate, snacks, and other things, but with cigarettes topping his priorities, he never dared to buy anything else. Wong, Park's next-door neighbor, sometimes gave him cigarettes in secret. Whether Wong had special influence in the prison or not, he certainly had the best financial situation in Unit

5. Of course, Wong received more money than Park, approximately 500 HKD, but Wong's expenses usually exceeded his salary.

At his nostrils, Park inhaled from the cigarette he had dragged on and pressed out, and slowly got to his feet to bring the tray that had come through the food slot to his table. Thinly sliced meat, potatoes, vegetables, and bright red tomatoes filled his tray, and were all smothered in an unidentified sauce. What a feast! If only he could have eaten three meals a day like this his whole life!

"Live worry without," Mudi Shiraf said in Cantonese, his customary greeting. Mudi Shiraf, a Pakistani from Karachi, was a Heroin major from the University of Delivery, and was serving out a 24 year sentence, during which time he'd picked up broken Cantonese.

"Even when we work slow, when it is time they give the meal. A clean and sturdy house. Nobody is beaten. Hong Kong prison is the best."

"You really like it?"

"Hao, Hao," agreeing in Cantonese. "It really is."

"Then why don't you stay here forever?"

"Puk You."

Mudi Shiraf immediately raised the middle finger of his right hand. Park was right. Even without anything to wear or eat, the wide-open outside world, free in all directions, was best. Where one could walk and walk along endlessly open roads. To the right or to the left, wherever one walked was freedom. It was a place where a person could see the whole sky in a single glance.

Park took the plastic fork and knife from his cup, and cut his meat clumsily. The thinly sliced meat cut easily.

I really miss kimchi.

As thoughts of kimchi overtook him, he closed his eyes tightly. Above his head the humid wind of Tung Tau Wan leaked through the short stainless steel bars, swirling in the small prison cell, and stealthily smeared the nape of Park's neck.

The afternoon shift began at two and ended at four o'clock. Because the daily amount of work was finished in the morning, in the afternoon there was nothing to do. The skillful prisoners would

make frames or boxes out of the leftover paper spread over the floor, but usually the other prisoners clustered together according to their departments and chatted. The members of the Murder Department neither talked much to each other, nor sought the company of other departments. In a corner, they just leaned against the walls with their eyes glued to the four meter high ceiling, or they flipped through unfinished books. The largest and most garrulous of the groups was the DD Department. While the Murder Department consisted mostly of Chinese, the DD Department consisted of a variety of nationalities: a combination of Southwest and Southeast Asians, and even a few prisoners from as far away as South America. For this reason, poor English was prevalent. Park also, through the poor English he'd learned his five years in Thailand, somehow joined the group. Though five or six out of ten prisoners spoke English unintelligibly, it was of no consequence. No matter how ragged their English was, in the end, as time went by, the prisoners could understand each other. If a prisoner could not understand the words of an acquaintance today, if understanding did not come tomorrow or the following week, surely it would come the following month.

Park quietly asked Wong, "What did he say?" He was asking about a Taiwanese prisoner who had come two days earlier. Since Park could not make out their loud speech, he assumed they were speaking in Mandarin. Wong's command of Cantonese, English, and even some Thai, made Park suspicious that Wong's career extended beyond the simple bounds of a Heroin major's from Production University.

"He said he was on his way to Taipei with two number fours (a street name for heroin) when he was caught in Hong Kong in Chek Lap Kok. Not counting the one-third for good behavior, his sentence is fourteen-years and eight-months long. He also seems to have delivered like you, but he'd only made two deliveries before his luck ran out. Still, he was lucky though, don't you think?"

"Why was he lucky?"

"That he was caught in Chek Lap Kok was lucky. What if he'd been caught in Chiang Kai-shek Airport? He would've been given

the death penalty immediately. By going between countries like that, he would have been nabbed eventually, so it was lucky that he was caught in Hong Kong and not Taipei.”

“So lucky that now he can rot in here for fourteen years and eight months.”

Unconsciously, Park clicked his tongue as he looked over the newcomer from Taipei, his forehead too wide and bald for his age. Like himself four months ago, the man had done something foolish. Patting his shoulder, as was his custom, Wong said, “Think positively. If you aim too high, you won’t get anywhere. Aim lower. If your sentence is fourteen years, imagine it’s twenty; if it’s twenty, imagine it’s thirty; if it’s thirty, think of it as a life sentence. You were also lucky to have been caught in Hong Kong, because if you’d paraded through either China or Thailand, or even Indonesia or Vietnam, you’d have been dead twice over.”

Smiling with his characteristic laugh, he slapped Park’s shoulder a little harder. This bastard. If he goes unchecked, he’ll end up punching me one day. His shoulder sore, Park stepped out of Wong’s arm reach. Nevertheless, Park envied Wong’s thinking. With time maybe he would also laugh like Wong, but for now, he couldn’t. He returned to his cell after the shift was over, and after the steel door had been shut, the world’s profoundest silence and calmness visited him, and cut him to pieces. His wife’s face, as he had last seen it on the hospital bed, and the image of his two sons who by now, were no longer toddlers, colored the empty grey walls. A letter his wife had sent informed him that with the money he had wired home, she had been able to have her entire stomach removed and complete her cancer treatment. Their children were doing well in school. “We’re doing OK, so please take care of yourself.” Now that a great worry had been resolved, she would visit soon, she had written. Nonsense. Despite his wife’s sincerity, without a stomach, how could she possibly travel to the strange and unfamiliar country of Hong Kong? “If you have that much money,” he wrote in his stern reply, “then either buy the children a ball point pen or buy yourself something good to eat.” He didn’t include this next thought though, but as he wrote he continuously mumbled, “Even

if the sky split in two, I still would have to stay here for more than ten years.”

Nurma, from Jakarta, Indonesia, slouched listlessly against the wall in the corner of the workshop by a paper cutter. He’d come to Chek Chue, CAT-A two years ago via Lai Chi Kok. Now he was at home in the ways of the prison. He had been captured in Chek Lap Kok Airport, an Ice Major from the University of Delivery, and sentenced to twenty-four years, eight months, or sixteen years, five months minus a third.

Thirty six years old, Nurma was from Jati Pulo slum in Jakarta. Born to parents with neither money nor land, he was the eighth child in a family of ten brothers, and grew up working a variety of jobs in Jati Pulo, tasting heroin for the first time at the young age of eighteen. Though free at first, he later had to pay for it. But since he lacked the nerve to mug people in the dead of night, to threaten them at knife point, he only had the chance to use heroin about once a month, and so he had never formed an addiction. It was for gambling that Nurma, in his thirties, had acquired an addiction. Even if gambling was illegal in Indonesia, untold numbers of gambling houses with Mickey Mouse poker machines were all over Jakarta. For some reason, Mickey Mouse’s allure had been stronger than heroin’s, and Nurma, day by day, had begun to sleep and wake in Mickey’s bosom. Since then, Nurma’s wife, who had married him at age nineteen and borne him three daughters and a son, saw his face scarcely once a month.

Now and then, when he crawled to his shack in Jati Pulo, Nurma boasted. “Just wait. We’ll hit the jackpot. And when we do, our luck will change.”

Whether he boasted or not, his wife nagged him and wished that he would him to show his sallow face to their children after the sun had risen, but it was useless. After giving her black eyes and scouring her pockets for change, like the wind, he would disappear for a while without contact.

One day, after a long while, Nurma had finally won some change from Mickey Mouse, and went in search of clubs in town where

he could snort heroin. As he tripped on the drug in a chair in the corner of the club, trying to forget everything, he met an old friend. "Hey, buddy," Nurma said.

Greeting his friend by placing his hands over each other and holding them to his chest, in the dark Nurma examined his friend snort heroin, and noticed of their differences. A gold necklace hung from the man's neck and he wore thick rings on his fingers. He wore a silk shirt.

Nurma said, "Buddy, if we grew up together, how is your life so different from mine?"

Upon hearing Nurma's question, his friend hesitated to touch the hem of his expensive-looking shirt and said, "Nurma". Mohammed said, "He is not a believer, who lets his neighbor starve as he fills his own belly. Since you're my friend, I won't keep you in the dark."

"Allah is most great!" Nurma said, "Praise be to Allah!"

Translated from the Korean by Miyeon and Albert Pulido

Monkfish Moon by Romesh Gunasekera

Obi C. Ithme

Emotions marinate under the tentative physical and verbal expressions of the characters in Romesh Gunasekera's *Monkfish Moon*, pushing through, but never quite releasing themselves from the fearful thoughts and unselfishly appropriate behaviour of the protagonists in the nine short stories. They straddle two cultural worlds, never quite knowing if they should remain in the safe calm of their routine lives, or if they should pierce the transparent film that separates them from their world of desire.

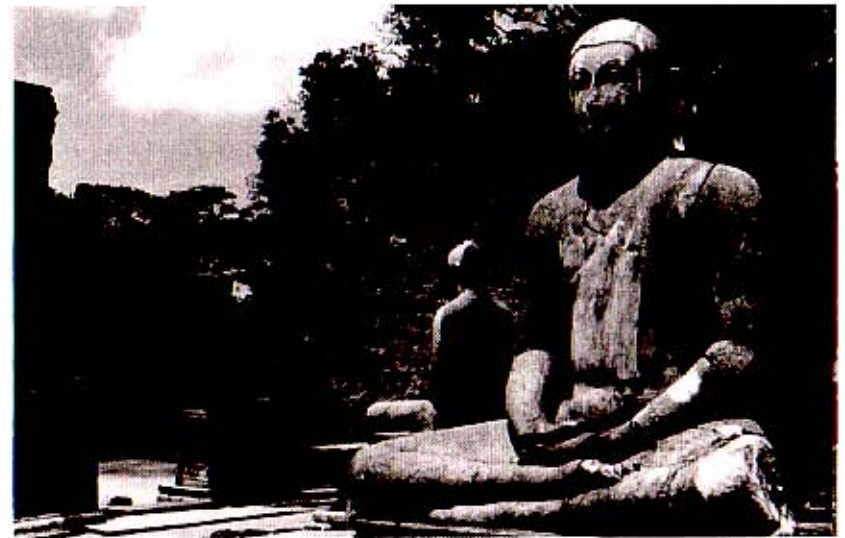
The very title perplexed me. What is a "Monkfish Moon?" The author takes us on a journey of unknown experiences, emotions and suddenly violent or ostentatious actions, which on their own say much more than a tender, heart to heart conversation ever could. Throughout the book the reader explores, tastes and delicately feels out the next steps with the characters. What should they do? What should they say? Do they reach out to another confused, unfulfilled soul, or more importantly, reach inside themselves and live, as they truly want? How can they blend reality with desire?

The opening smiles at you, inviting you to enter the world of words and discover the delicious, succulent images that sit on the branches of the author's pen, waiting to be plucked and tasted. Through the very simple, elegant, and spicy descriptions offered by Gunasekera, the reader can clearly see the trees, the houses, the flowers and the ground on which these stories take place. The vivid, luscious descriptions of the surrounding vegetation capture the reader's sight, taste and smell; one can discern the chlorophyll in the leaves, and the flowers' fragrances. Such beautiful natural surroundings envelop the living spaces and the daily spheres of the characters' lives, creating the beautiful yet simple microcosm in which they exist. The author also stirs a plethora of native words into the story and easily lets us know the meaning behind

them without fragmenting the story, giving authenticity. Additionally, the characters' emotions and thoughts jump out at us indirectly through poignant writing about their daily actions and thoughts, which proves a far more intimate way to know them than plainly telling us their emotions. We even feel as though we have known them for years. Their conversations lend us real insight into the simplicity of their lives and apparent contentment, but always shock the reader back into reality with insidious references to the macrocosm of the fractious political climate, violence and atrocities which belie a blatant disregard for human life.

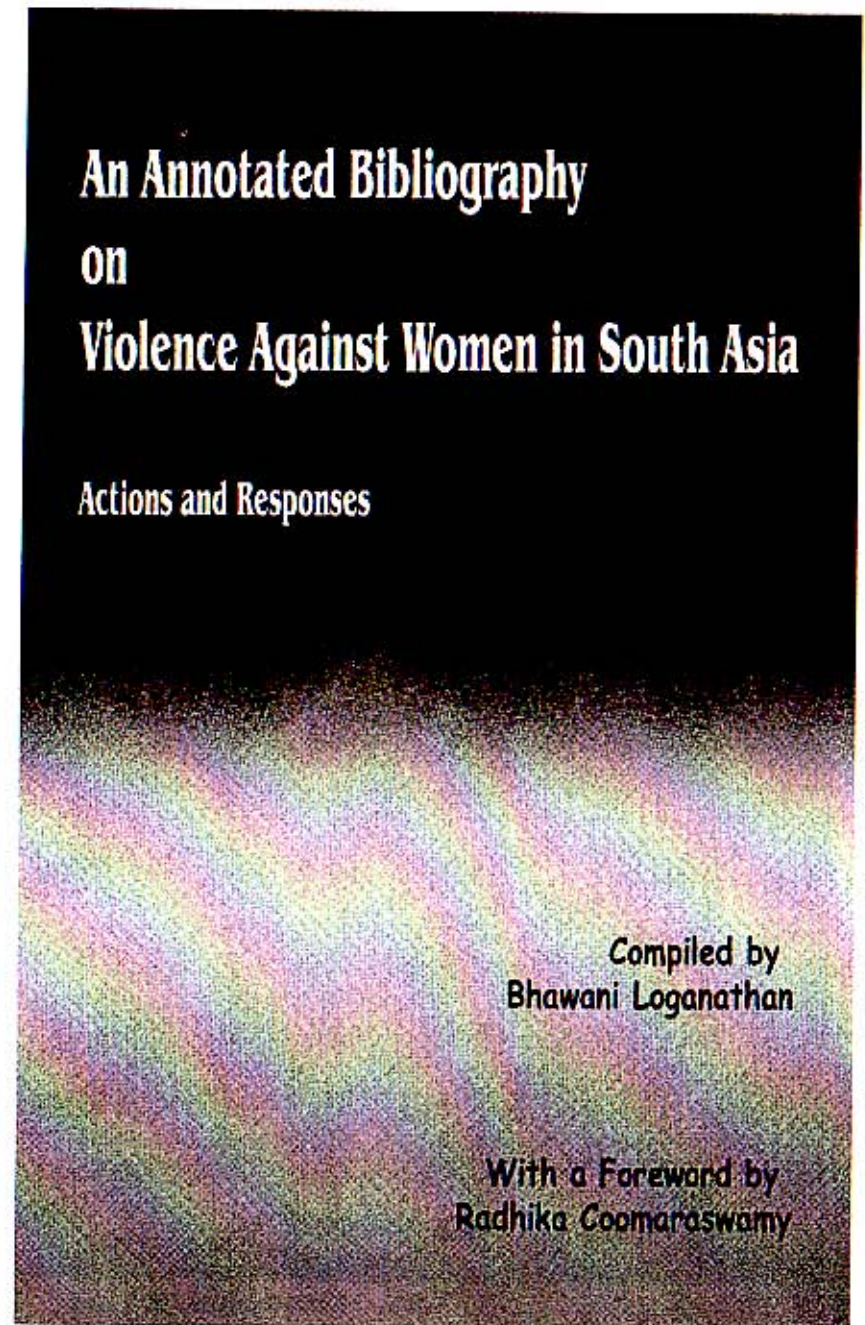
The people in the various stories live simply, taking in the fullness of their daily existence, savouring the customs, smells, tastes and sights that capture them every day. Their daily interactions with certain others who are connected to and part of the environment bring conflict with their ways of being and with what their backgrounds, tastes and opinions represent. The protagonists want to touch them, experience their joy and pain, and sit side by side with them. They want to see what they see, but live in a floating bubble of their own existence, sitting quietly, always peering outside through the film, trying to poke through, but never fully piercing it and falling down to earth. Additionally, the protagonists are too afraid to let genuine, spontaneous emotions express themselves and bubble over the calm veneer of propriety and a fear of the emotional awkwardness of asking the other, "What do you want? How do you feel?" In reality, it is a mask for the fear of asking themselves the same questions.

The characters are unsatisfied with life as it is, and want either to return to the bliss of before, or to jump into new and more exciting lives, involving themselves with their environment and in doing so discover more about their culture. The people with whom they interact provide channels for releasing this desire, a tree from which to pick the fruits of discovery, but the self-imposed barrier of self-doubt and tentativeness prevents this interaction. The backdrop of political conflict further complicates the struggle to reach out to the other, for the turmoil adds to the intimate and complex influence on this way of being of the others. The potential



for violence to interrupt and burst the bubbles of existence lurks in the background, not quite visible, but smiling on them nevertheless, waiting for its chance.

Despite the complexity, Gunesequera's minimalist style does the stories complete justice, speaking little, but saying all, so often fully allowing a complex characterisation of emotions in just one sentence and still the reader fully understands, feeling present with the character. This style also dictates the stories themselves, as they are short and direct, yet encapsulate a range of emotions of the character. The departure from this comes from the feeling of want that the reader will have after reading the conclusions. There is so much more to be known and imagined that the reader could invent almost any scenario to fully relate to the story. Perhaps that is the author's intention, to provide the atmosphere, set the events in motion and then leave the emotional lesson to us. This book will leave you reflecting, wondering, or imagining, but will leave the reader with intellectual and emotional food to digest long after the last page has turned.



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