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Nēthrā

A non-specialist journal for lively minds



INTERNATIONAL CENTRE FOR ETHNIC STUDIES, COLOMBO

Nēthrā

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Nēthrā

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Contributors

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Indran Amirthanayagam writes poetry and essays in English and Spanish. He has published widely and his book of poetry *The Elephants of Reckoning* won the Patterson Prize in 1994.

Alefiya Akberally is a free-lance photographer who specializes in reportage and fashion photography. She has had many exhibitions her latest being *Off the Peg* series for the Goethe Institute.

It is reasonable to view the dawn of a New Year as symbolic of things that are new; it is a time for fresh beginnings, a time for change. This year it is precisely that, which we see for the International Centre of Ethnic Studies, where significant change occurred with the appointment of a new Executive Director, Dr. Rama Mani in January 2007.

The handing of the torch so to speak from Radhika Coomaraswamy to Rama Mani segued with the affable and efficient Interim Executive Director, Mr. Bradman Weerakoon. The year ahead holds exciting and vibrant promise for ICES as Dr. Mani super-imposes her dynamic vision on the Center which is committed to a greater understanding of ethnic conflict, human rights, gender, social justice and the creative arts.

This year also sees the 25th anniversary of the ICES in June 2007, making me proud to have been associated with the Centre from 1989 when I entered as an insignificant intern to work with first Radhika and then Neelan Tiruchelvam on various projects. It is a relationship that I never wanted to end, and over my eighteen year association with the Centre, I have held many positions and played many parts. All of them rewarding, all of them enduring and all of them certainly interesting. ICES, in its 25 years has achieved much in the field of social sciences, policy and the arts and culture, where it is has made a deep and lasting contribution.

Nethra, which began as the primary journal of the ICES has gone through many transformations to become now, the creative expression of the Centre. In this year of farewell, welcome and celebration for ICES, I want *Nethra* to grow in scope, with improved production and wider circulation. It is an ambition worthy of *Nethra*.

We kick off the year with an issue that gives us a wonderfully entertaining review essay where *Peter Nazareth* Professor of English at the University of Iowa, takes on Jameela Siddiqi, the author of the novel 'Bombay Gardens' in an e-mail exchange that reviews, educates, entertains, and reveals insights to the reader in a new and fresh way. Perhaps continuing the change of pace, we have writer *Manuka Wijesinghe* giving her opinion on the desecration in the name of commercialism of holy and revered spaces like Kataragama in Sri Lanka. Manuka who writes with her own fast paced bouncy style spares no home truths in her opinion piece. *Indran Amirthanayagam* a regular contributor and established poet pays tribute to Regi Siriwardene, the first editor of *Nethra* who was mentor, teacher, muse, friend and adviser to many including myself. *Sashi Premawardene* and *Vivimarie van der Poorten* poets who touch on tragedy and sadness reveal that even the smallest of events have the ability of touching the soul with sensitivity and compassion. *Tanya Uluwita* gives us a short story that opens a window into relationships, power struggles and in the end simple emotion. Our youngest contributor to date, *Hariharasharma* offers a mature and gripping short story that takes us to the heart of the conflict in Sri Lanka: a mother and her son, trying to survive in a landscape that is harsh and inhospitable and yet is their home. Finally we have *Alefiya Akberally's* wonderful photographs in a series entitled 'Everyday Heroes'. I have traditionally gifted our readers a poem for the New Year. This year will be no different. I end with the words of the Lord Buddha:

*Victory breeds hate, for the conquered is unhappy.
Whoever has given up victory and defeat
is content and lives joyfully.*

Ameena Hussein

A Review Essay

BOMBAY GARDENS

Peter Nazareth

PREVIEW

Jameela,

I've just finished reading *Bombay Gardens*.

It is a brilliant novel. It is very different from *The Feast of the Nine Virgins*, although I identified your writer's genetic imprint (the importance of writing, the importance of film, the spiritual and mystical importance of music, twinnings, the parallel between the external events and the "internal" events, the almost-apocalyptic penultimate actions, the sharp and humorous observations, the connection yet gap between Indians in East Africa and in India, sexual exploitation of women on the part of most men. I need to give it some more thought.

When did you write it? I noticed some connections with my novel *The General is Up* (the Dictator loves the Queen of England).

You give the small people great credibility and depth through your fiction. You seem to be putting them down, but you are really putting them up.

I am honored you dedicated it to me.

Peter



Peter,

I'm truly honoured to be able to dedicate the novel to you because, although we have never met – except through our fiction – in a sense, you made me write it, or at any rate, complete it. Your *The General is Up* and *In a Brown Mantle*, your short stories as well your

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radio plays, did me a great service — feeding my imagination and bringing to life certain long-forgotten incidents witnessed in childhood — all of which dove-tailed into *Bombay Gardens*. My dictator became much more real since I got to know your *General*. And those UPC/Kabaka Yekka and DP (Uganda's main political parties) processions became quite real, once again.

You also introduced me to some terrific writers and writing from the “Far East” — and, most importantly, Bessie Head and Violet Dias Lannoy — all of which kept the creative juices flowing. I began *BG* on the day I handed in the final manuscript of *Feast* (1997), and the very first scene I wrote was Shahbanu on the verandah, a potential new tenant with her fragrance of jasmine and roses, making Naranbhai sweat in the mid-morning heat, after which I wrote the double-photo scene followed by the joint-suicide of the twin sisters, Mohini and Sohini.

I left it for a while and then picked it up and finished it in 2003 with a final revision in 2004. I only did a brief re-revise in 2006, removing one character entirely and shortening the story of Mama Safia, before submitting to Lulu. (The Lulu experience has been a very positive one indeed.)

I think the Shahbanu psychology is one that I understand very well. I tried to ape that real-life situation in the book where everybody knows, but nobody really wants to know what she does for a living, added to which the respectability of marriage gives her a suitable cover. Basically, as long as a woman is married (to whomsoever, even an invisible husband) she can do whatever she likes! I witnessed this for real: where unmarried women were considered a potential danger to a stable society whereas married women, however badly behaved, were excused. Similarly, as long as piety was seen to take place, it was assumed the person was pious.

Then again, “Satish the Bachelor” and his unreasonable demands for a perfect wife were based on real experience: in the original draft, Satish is gay and in denial — hence the need for a “perfect” woman. In the revisions, I decided to not make him out and out gay because, in those days, people didn’t “come out” as such. Gay men just rejected candidate after candidate for potential wife!

Bimla asking Naranbhai to marry her and get her out of the country came through without my even thinking about it. I really appreciate your close re-reading of the novel and, even as the writer, I sometimes laughed uncontrollably when reading certain chapters recently. Writing does take on a different form and meaning when it appears between laminated covers.

I really look forward to reading your review(s).

Jameela



Jameela,

It just struck me this morning that Sushilaben, the first wife, saved her daughter by waylaying (and throwing out?) the milk laced with poison that Geeta (Mrs. Naranbhai the second) was giving her. And like Uncle Robin in Ishmael Reed’s *Flight to Canada*, she fed the person her own swill (in Robin’s case, he gave Swille, the corporate leader/slaveowner, the poisonous Coffeemate that the corporation produces). The clue was the italicizing of the word milk that Sushilaben fed Geeta when she was vulnerable. It could only be italicized if she knew of the poison.

Your women are not all innocent dolls. In fact, being in an oppressive (patriarchal) situation, they find ways of scheming under the cover of compliance, which Kamla, the orphan, does not do (and needs to learn to do because she continually pays a heavy price for her directness). And maybe by the end she has learned because she writes the novel, as far as I can tell. And in the novel, she pushes Pandit Suddenly (suddenly) into the fire as revenge (?) for the way the widows were made by the man-made rules to jump into the fire—MAYBE, the novel says, and it is possible Kamla did not do it but Camilla the novelist suggests she might have done.

Very subtle writing—but blunt when you get Camilla to attack the publishers for not wanting to publish works by an East African Indian about East African Indians. And yet you pay tribute to film—the Bollywood movie—for the way it offers Mad Girl Kirti her dharma (again very subtle since this is done within a novel).

The Sun / Moon portions reminded me of Bessie's *Maru* (and, to a lesser extent, my *The General is Up*), where the Expulsion deadline is by the next moon.

Peter



Peter,

Exactly right! The women are not so innocent. Being in that patriarchal situation brings an innate sharpness of its own, as I observed in Pakistan in 1996 where the women were all “passive-aggressive”—especially when it came to wife versus mistress. The two would often team up and terrorise the man into giving them an Amex card each!

The novel has also hinted at a special understanding between First wife and African houseboy Jannasani. (You never know where you might find love!) And, yes, pushing the pandit into his own fire is an echo of a revenge from the days of “Sati”. In those days women were drugged up to their eyeballs and then “shown” to jump willingly into the fire. There’s a fort in Rajasthan, where I went and all along a wall leading to where the pyres used to be burnt, there are hand-prints of satis-to-be, who would place their palms, vermillion dipped, onto the wall to add testimony to the fact that they were faithful, loyal wives — the only proof of loyalty being the willingness to prefer suicide to widowhood. From here I got the image of Mohini-Sohini, wrists drenched in blood, lying dead in their sakati — backyard.

Yes, Sun-Moon sections were heavily influenced by *The General is Up* and, of course, by *Maru*— to which you led me. But I didn’t want to spell this out in the dedication. I wanted it to be a personal kind of “thanksgiving” rather than something in return for something else.

Jameela



Alefiya Akberally

Jameela,

Yes, I got it loud and clear this, my third, reading of the novel: I mean about Sushilaben and Jannasani. (There is a fine story by Lino Leitao in the Goan anthology I edited in 1983 about a Goan woman who had a child by her African servant, and she tells the narrator years later it was love, and her husband accepted the child.) This was a stunning surprise to Naranbhai: but paradoxically, it made her more desirable (more attractive) to him, maybe because she was attractive to another man.

I think your two novels are structured differently. I think *Feast* is three sets of parabolae that finally intersect. This one is a series of short chapters, so short that they are almost anecdotal, which fits the way the ordinary people communicate.

Yes, you could not detail what you took from what: that would reduce the dedication.

Peter



Peter,

This is a message someone I knew in my younger days just sent me:

Hi Jameela! How's life and everything? Trying to get back into swing of things here, but something has definitely changed. That weekend has caused a lot of stirrings inside, something awakening again, but it's very unsettling too... Enjoyed *Bombay Gardens* enormously. Here's me trying to come to terms with what I feel and having difficulty describing it, whereas you not only create characters with such a wide range of emotional expressions, but you create a beautiful story. I have learnt more about Muhindis, and Indian-Indians from your book than anywhere else. I identified strongly with Baby, as I grew up as the only Indian kid in an African environment. The other happenings in *Bombay Gardens* itself were a revelation. I imagine much of the same sort of thing happened in Nyeri. But didn't know much of that there...so

I stand better informed and educated, thanks to you!! You have certainly given me tools and expressions with which to feel my own feelings too — hence the unsettled mode. Your powers of observation, and perception and your sensitivity in being able to understand and describe relationships and peoples' thoughts, are remarkable. Read a lot of Bombay Gardens in train, the bomb scare gave a bit more time! Finished the last few pages this lunchtime. I was sorry to have reached the last page, wished there was more...felt a sense of emptiness...something incomplete...you will have to write the continuation to that...I am sure Baby has more to say...

I can't wait to read your review(s)!

Jameela



Jameela,

What better review could you receive than that! It's as though your novel is the work of Zarine, the Dream Teacher in *Feast*. But I am a scholar and will write a scholarly review, even though there may be many starts and detours because your novel is not linear.

Peter

REVIEW

Bombay Gardens is the second novel by Jameela Siddiqi, her first being *The Feast of the Nine Virgins* (London: Bogle-L'Ouverture, 2001). Like the first novel, the second deals with the traumatic expulsion of Asians from Uganda by Idi Amin in 1972. But once again, while drawing from something that actually happened, Siddiqi treats the Expulsion and the dictator in her own way, and in ways

that are different in the two novels. The first novel operates on three planes simultaneously and they finally meet; the second seems to operate on two planes of time, some chapters taking place in present time (in London) and the others in the past time (Uganda or a Uganda-like country, leading up to the Expulsion), so they appear to be different. Furthermore, the chapters in the second novel are very short, so that the effect of the novel is like reading a volume of interconnected short stories or even anecdotes with aphorisms as titles. The second novel, unlike the first, focuses on a group of ordinary Indians living in a rented building in Uganda, which is given the grandiose name of "Bombay Gardens", connecting it to an image of luxury and to India. The landlord is Naranbhai, the least successful member of a large industrial Indian family in Uganda. He is obsessed with being successful, with becoming rich in any way he can, but he is not a bad landlord. To oversee his Bombay Gardens, he lives in his house nearby, Naran Villa. The two buildings are "twinned" and in fact "twinning" images run through this novel (Siddiqi herself is a twin).

But when I get this far in describing the novel, I realize that I should say that the novel actually begins with a Prologue entitled, *PRINCESS WAKEFUL*, "a true story from India circa. 1563." The story begins: "Once upon a time there was a Princess." This is in font like that of a typescript. Immediately, the story gets interrupted by the following comments in brackets: "Why can't I start with those words? All my childhood stories always began like that." The reader wonders who this narrator is. The interruption is immediately interrupted by the following in what is clearly a font on the computer: "Why is she talking to herself in the middle of a story she has submitted for a competition? Is she crazy?" So in the space of five lines, Siddiqi has started a fairy tale from India, introduced us to the notion that this is a story written by an author who finds it difficult to tell such a story because it may not fit her world, and even that she finds it difficult to tell her story, and then we realize someone is reading the story and wondering how the writer can interrupt her own story. "Is she crazy?" shows the curiosity and the involvement

of the unknown reader. This continues through the prologue: interruptions by the storyteller, who lacks the energy and maybe the persistence and maybe enough knowledge to tell the full story, and a curious obsessive reader who comments on the inadequacy of the story until we get her comment, "Hey! This story is beginning to ring a bell — no, it's more than a bell: it's a deafening roar, like thunder!" And the reader takes over the story:

What? Is she mad? And all this time I've had to live with the guilt of sabotaging her manuscript when she has hijacked my story — a story that wasn't even all there! What amazes me is that she tells the story up to the same point that I know it. How does she know this story? And why is she withholding the end? Surely, she sent in an incomplete version by mistake?

So Siddiqi has established a connection between the two: or many pairs of twos, many "twins": the writer of the manuscript, the reader of the manuscript. The fairy tale from the past connecting to the present in some mysterious way. The incomplete story that is shared by writer and reader. And how did the reader sabotage the manuscript? How was the story that of the reader? These are questions of individuals, but also of writer/critic, of the nature of a story, of how a story can be told. And this is what frames the story we are going to read.

BG is a polyphonic novel that operates on many levels and challenges the reader, and even more the critic, to figure out and analyze its form and structure. It takes place in two times. The past in Uganda, leading to the Expulsion of Asians by a dictator, and present time, beginning with an incomplete fairy-tale (as we have seen) that leads one woman (the reader of the story) to track down and talk to the writer of the story (with whose husband she, the reader, has been having an affair now broken off by the man). These chapters are narrated by the reader, a younger woman who insists to the other woman that she is not an African or a "chauthara" (of mixed race) just because she speaks like an African but a "pure Indian" who for reasons she does not know but wants to know was given by her Indian mother to an African Muslim mother, Mama

Safia, and left to be brought up as an African. Then why is she living in London, just like the other (older) woman who is there because of the Expulsion? She has discovered that the other woman, who was called Camilla, is not an Englishwoman but an Indian married to an Englishman and hating Indian men except for her father who had been father and mother to her. When Camilla asks the younger woman for her name, she says she was called Baby and we don't whether that is her real name.

Camilla tells her that she looks like Kitty Complex, a Bollywood star, which is a clue to us that we may not understand now but which is significant by the end of the novel.

Turns out Baby and Camilla (Kamla) lived in the same building—it was called “Bombay Gardens” when Kamla lived there until the Expulsion in 1972 and Baby lived there when the name was changed after the Expulsion. Baby wants to know who lived there, because she found photos of people who lived there that she wants to understand. Mama Safia brought her up in a privileged way with her five African sons but never told her what her origins were except that she did not want her to be brought up as a Muslim because she (Baby) was not a Muslim. So where did she come from? What triggers her search in London is a song, a famous Bollywood song (so she is told when she hears it in an Indian shop and buys the CD) which repeats itself in her head although she does not know Indian languages. Camilla knows the same song.

The following questions arose from the relationship between Baby and Camilla-Kamla: What is the past relationship between them? Why do they remember the same song, and both incompletely, even though they apparently never met before? What was the result of their occupying the same space at different times when the house had a different name? Are there spirits in the house that inhabit the people who inhabit the house? Does the past carry over into the future? Do they both carry different phases of the future with them? How important is it for them to find out what the past was? How does this relate to who they are now? Is this relationship personal or is it also of nations, races, political periods (colonial, postcolonial)? How do they relate to the ancestraluntry,

India? Are they trapped by that past or does discovering that past free them to change in the present? What roles do different art forms play in such discovery — oral story, story in print, song, film, and photo? How does the movement of discovery in the present affect the story of the past? Is the story of the past “objective” or is it constructed by someone from the present time looking back? Is the novel a jigsaw puzzle not only for the participants but also for the reader, who must help to put the pieces together and discover the meaning?

The novel is full of “twinnings”, as I said earlier. Naranbhai had twin nieces Mohini and Sohini who were rejected by their husbands after their marriage, and they later committed suicide because of the disgrace. Turns out that Naranbhai had tried to save money by having a double engagement and a double wedding (that is, wedding of the twins at the same time) but there was a mix up after the wedding and the brides ended up with the wrong husbands. Although nothing sexual happened, nobody would believe it and the brides were rejected. When we look at Naranbhai himself, we discover a parallel: he has a second wife he is married to while his first wife lives in the same building. We discover why: the first wife, Sushilaben, had given birth to a daughter, Kirti, who was mad, according to everyone - completely uncontrollable and later given to bursting into song.

Naranbhai married the second woman because he wanted sons, and she gave him three sons. He married her in India, when she was about to take the final vows as a nun. She too had earlier taken part in a double wedding, following which there was a car accident and she ended up with the wrong husband (since the marriages were arranged, man and woman did not know each other), and although they only talked during the night, nobody believed that nothing sexual had happened so she was rejected as though she was a widow—but she was strongwilled and would not have committed sati so she went to become a nun.

We have already mentioned the twin buildings, Bombay Gardens and Naran Villa. Then there are the twin gods Rahu and Ketu. When Naranbhai's mother was dying, aged only 34, she gave

Naranbhai little statuettes of the two gods because they were “symbols of the gods of joy and sorrow, riches and poverty, bounty and famine, plenty and little.” Her injunction to him was,

Son, always aim to keep the forces balanced. There is good and there is evil. There is joy, and there is sorrow. One without the other makes no sense.

The twin gods are a reminder of the yin and yang of life. Naranbhai carried the two for a long time—until one god vanished and then he threw the other one out not realizing that he needed to dispose of it properly (according to Pandit Suddenly). The twinning runs through the novel, from identical twins to those who are connected because they are opposites, all the way to the metaphor of those thrown out of Africa suddenly who become their twin selves.

The novel has two parallel lines: Uganda leading to the Expulsion and the people in England connected to one another in ways we discover at the end of the novel. For the purpose of analysis, we must follow one strand first and then another. We can follow the story of Naranbhai, a capitalist entrepreneur, the landlord of a building he is renting out to poor Asians in a city like Kampala in Uganda. Or we can follow the relationship of two women, both of them wannabe storytellers, in England, both of whom turn out to have come from Uganda at different times: one during the Expulsion and the other a few years later when things had deteriorated in Uganda.

They were united by the fact that they had lived in the same building in Uganda, Bombay Gardens, but what united them over and above it all is the attempt to tell a story, a fairy-tale story of a beautiful princess in India who suddenly could not sleep and her father offered a reward to anyone who could make her sleep and nobody succeeded until a Rangeelay Khan turned up and sang a song that put her to sleep. The princess fell in love with him and wanted to marry him but all he asked for was the right to turn down the proposal and return to his wife. For this, the princess lied that he had molested her and that is how he had put her to sleep—through sex. And for this, he was put to death by the King by

being walled up. Too late the princess recanted: and when the walls were pulled down, there was nobody there. A question running through the novel is whether this is same figure, Hazari Baba, a mystic magician, who keeps turning up in the story to help heal people. And who was perhaps the figure that looked over Naranbhai having sex with his new wife in the open air in India despite the injunctions of the astrologer that he had to wait for some time, as a result of which his wife gave birth to a mad daughter—that is, everyone considered her mad because she was uncontrollable and sang at awkward moments, though the songs were always appropriate to what was happening?

Mysterious people turn up in the novel; and should we feel that such things cannot happen in real life, at some point we realize that we were prepared for them by the fairy tale at the beginning and the probability that Camilla (Kamla) and/or Baby are writing the story. What led to the fairy tale in the first place? Why do so many cultures have mysterious, magical occurrences in stories that also have realistic elements, a recent example being Ngugi wa Thiong'o's new novel, *Wizard of the Crow* (Pantheon Books, New York)? Could it be that such stories emerged Holographically from the collective unconscious of the people

Naranbhai would have none of that. He is—he thinks—very realistic because he is a businessman. Yet he has blind spots, operating, as he does, in what we would call a patriarchal society (surrounded by a patriarchal power, British imperialism). He is drawn to women and knows how to maneuver in order to keep them fighting among themselves. This is the way he seeks balance: his first wife Sushilaben fights against his second wife and each of them has an ally, his sister the widow Nalini being the ally of Sushilaben and Kamini Masi a former film actress of Indian movies of the silent era the ally of her niece Geeta, the second Mrs. Naranbhai.

INTERMISSION

Jameela,

I don't know where to go with the review so I am sending it to you as it stands. Your novel has aspects of the Trickster novel. When one gets to the end and almost everything falls into place, you realize the clues were in the text linguistically but the reader misread them. What is fascinating to me, though, is the way you are dealing with the nature of writing—the incomplete fairytale that is going to drive the whole novel, the importance of non-realistic fairytales to humanity, the need for the critic/reader (Baby) to drive the writer by asking practical questions, the importance of other forms of art to (modern) writing (photos, movies, songs), the way writing can transform life, and Society in Modern Africa), and metaphysically, the question of time and space—and spirits.

Peter



Peter,

That is interesting. The fairy-tale in my book is one I constructed inspired by things I read about music and musicians of the “Golden Age” in India, (15th -16th Century) and it is also an almost exact reversal of *The Sleeping Beauty*: she sleeps for a 100 years and remains as young and beautiful as when she fell asleep. My Princess, however, is “robbed” of sleep and is left bad-tempered and aging before her time. However, when there is a cure, instead of being grateful, she accuses the musician of rape — just because her ego cannot accept the fact that he wishes to return to his wife rather than marry her and receive half the Kingdom. The musician, from the 15th century, shows a kind of love and devotion to his wife that won't change through being offered these riches.

Then there's Naranbhai, five hundred years later, more than eager to re-marry and considering it his birthright just so he can have a (normal, male) child. I guess I'm pointing at some kind of moral decline in love and loyalty here. People are much greedier now and ready to jeopardise everything for something they see as “gain”. (It's the “must-have” culture, or the “I'm worth it” culture that has fed into the selfishness of humans.)

I've been thinking about Hazari Baba a lot — yes, of course, he's modelled on a Sufi sage but in my mind he represents the Indian spirit of East Africa. That is to say, our spirit, as a collective — and how we rose above the ashes, no matter how they humiliated us during that final Expulsion deadline of 90 days, when we queued up to be verified as citizens and to put ourselves at the whim of some petty official who could decide who was staying by verifying our Uganda citizenship, who was going by taking away our Uganda citizenship.

Various Indians sang to keep others amused —including a couple of professional singers (Ismailis) from M'bale who used to get paid to sing on UTV. The songs stuck in my mind — despite the bad news about my being made stateless, that very day. And I think the image of Hazari Baba, calmly sitting and singing in his prison cell must've taken form in my subconscious that day. But, miraculously, it linked up with the fairy tale and his song sent the soldiers to sleep! And then there's the lovely Jannasani (based on a real houseboy of neighbours) who is able to fall asleep in almost any position and can remain so (according to Mrs. Naranbhai) through earthquakes, floods and the actual end of the world!

Jameela

BREAKDOWN

Jameela,

For heaven's sake, how am I to know all that? Should I dump my review?

Peter



Peter,

Hey, you're doing great! We both stood in those Expulsion queues — separately — and had our citizenship taken away, remember? You are breaking on through to the other side, as the Doors sing. Remember a breakdown can be a breakthrough!

Jameela



Jameela,
All right, all right! I'll continue.
Peter

BREAKING ON THROUGH

One can say that Naranbhai's reliance on his twin gods is a reflection of not only the way his life is full of twins and twinnings but also that his obsession for balance leads frequently to an imbalance. He does not recognize his real relationship to women. He is sexually attracted to Shahbanu, a beautiful woman who becomes one of his tenants with her daughter. She says she is married and her husband is always on the move, but given the number of men who visit her (her brothers, she says), Naranbhai does not let himself recognize that she is in fact prostituting herself: something that becomes clear to the reader very soon. Perhaps he wants to see a beautiful woman as being a pure doll. He finds every excuse to see her and play the commanding man helping out a helpless woman, while it becomes clear to the reader that she is playing a game of seeming helplessness to twist Naranbhai round her little finger. Mrs. Naranbhai recognizes his attraction to Shahbanu and fights it as much as she can, using as much strategy as she can, sometimes crude and at other times skillful.

It's a man's world, and the women acquire power in subtle ways. This is with the exception of Kamla (later Camilla), who fights directly, and frequently pays a price, in contrast to her elder sister Bimla, who is almost completely accepting and pays a price too. So maybe going to an extreme is not the way too.



Peter,
Bimla is the cleverer one. She knows how to get what she wants by working within the system and obeying the rules laid down by men. She wants to be married – at any price, to whomsoever. She manages

to do just that. Kamla's goals are untenable. She wants to be a doctor and even though her father has left sufficient funds for her education, the patriarchs around her are just not going to allow it.

Jameela



Jameela,

How come you responded to what I just wrote? Did I press a key and send it to you without realizing it? I don't agree with what you say. It was Kamla who used cunning to wreck Bimla's chances of marriage. Naranbhai had used his clout against his tenant Satish the Bachelor (bachelor because he was waiting for his dream girl) to arrange a marriage with Bimla, whose father Virjibhai had just died by being hit by a lorry and then being run over by a car. (Naranbhai was both altruistic and selfish: he had arranged to take control over the insurance money Virjibhai had left.) Kamla heard the story Kamini Masi, Geeta's aunt who was a silent movie actress, told the D'Sa boys about the astrologer saying that any man who married her would die within six months (a plot from a movie); Kamla appropriated it and told Satish that this is what the astrologer said about Bimla. So Satish did not turn up for the wedding and Bimla was left helplessly as a "widow." I think Kamla used the story again to keep off other suitors.

Peter



Peter,

But Bimla wanted to become a conventional housewife, not to be "free" like Kamla. And she put it to Naranbhai to marry her—he was in prison at the time, his wife Geeta had died apparently out of emotion at his arrest but actually because she was poisoned by what she had put into the milk that was fed to her by Sushilaben, and Sushilaben had gone to India with Kirti, we discover and the only way he could get out would be by marrying her and going to England with her. So she is the housewife in England of the Grumpy Old

Man, who is Naranbhai. She got what she wanted, whereas Kamla had been in a frustrating marriage with an Englishman, whose affairs she had condoned. And she had not become a doctor.

Jameela



Jameela,

I agree that the Expulsion hit like a bolt from the blue and suddenly people from the small town in Uganda were living in London — living a life so different with so many different obstacles and opportunities that it was as though they were different people, so different that when we work on the two planes of time, we do not know they are the same persons. And yes, Kamla, who becomes Camilla, did not become a doctor—but she did become a healer through writing the novel egged on by the questions Baby asked her. And you too are a healer because I laughed aloud several times when reading the novel. It has been proven that laughter heals and empowers.

Peter.



Peter,

I'm glad you laughed! The nature of the Expulsion was such that it made a unique kind of immigration — instead of a slow trickle, here they were, lock stock and barrel, several thousand, all at once, into the same country. Many found they lived next door to the same neighbours they'd had in Uganda. There are entire streets, in the city of Leicester, for example, inhabited by (now) rich Ugandan Asians. By the way, they only became "Ugandan" by coming to Britain. Over there, they were "British Asians". And there are many Shahbanus, previously wily and charming, even beautiful. Now they have middle-age spread and have to wear bulky clothing against the British weather — no more shocking pink, see-through glass nylon!

Jameela



Jameela,

Yes, you are right. Let me continue.

Peter

ENDING

There was no segue for most of the people, although a few had made plans to leave before the Expulsion. So does it mean that everything was random and nobody had anything to do with what happened to him or her? The novel suggests otherwise, and we can see this when we follow the story of Naranbhai. It is as we are getting to the end of the novel that we realize the grumpy old man sitting in front of the TV set in London is Naranbhai, the businessman constantly looking for an opportunity to make money in ways that are shady but which he does not think of as such, the man who married a second wife without divorcing the first because the first had only a daughter who was "mad" while the second did in fact give him three sons; the man who was attracted to a woman who was his tenant and who was prostituting herself using strategies that even charmed the reader, the lithe woman who is currently a portly neighbor of the grumpy old man. Did Naranbhai do anything that led to his life as a grumpy old man or was it just fate, just losing first the one and then the other of the twin gods he always carried and rubbed?

The looming Expulsion deadline leads to a Kafka-esque experience for the main characters. Naranbhai, who has bent his morality — that is, he has done some immoral things while hiding them from himself — finds himself locked up in prison with other prisoners (all African), a horrendous place with little room and terrible smells. Kamla, fleeing the imprisonment of living in a small town because her sister has been married off to a tree in the area and the Dictator had decided the tree is not to be chopped down, fleeing in the back of a delivery truck, is imprisoned in the truck — and then when she gets back to the city, going to the person she thought would protect her, her late father's employer, gets raped by him instead. The only way Naranbhai can be freed from jail is by

being expelled, and the way to do it is the way Bimla suggests: marrying her and leaving the country with her. Pandit Suddenly, burning all his documents in anger, suddenly is in the flames, perhaps pushed in by Kamla in revenge for all the satis but in a deeper way revenge for the fact that the Pandit always referred to the scriptures which were interpreted favourably to the males, such as his suggestion that when Bimla was deserted by her husband-to-be she get married to a tree so she would have the respectability of being married. Siddiqi says that South Asian culture is so marriage-centred that even marriage to an inanimate object is preferable to no marriage. There are still instances, in Indian villages, where girls are married off to water pots and other objects, usually to ward off evil. Once the water pot is broken, the girl can be declared a widow. It does not happen in the novel because the Dictator gets into the act, thinking that gold is buried at the bottom of the tree Bimla has been married to so a law is passed that the tree cannot be chopped down.

As I implied earlier, there is the reference to other forms of art in the novel. Naranbhai invites Bollywood stars to Uganda to publicize the opening of his new cinema, but it goes all wrong, and people get killed by a (deliberately loosened by his Useless Nephew Bharat) ceiling fan and he gets arrested and imprisoned. But the director is taken by the beauty of Uganda and then by the wonderful singing of Mad Girl Kirti. He takes her to India, with her mother Sushilaben, and turns her into a singing movie star, renamed Kitty Complex. While most people were expelled West, the two found their fame and fortune and independence East, back in the ancestral motherland, thanks to the Bollywood movie!

There is an importance reference to another art form. There is D'Sa, a Goan, who lives in Bombay Gardens, an alcoholic who alternates between beating his wife and making love to her. He had been found taking bribes, most usual for a Goan, and he lost his job and was abandoned by Goans. He has a large family, so large they are just given numbers from 1 to 11. While the wife keeps the family together through her piano lessons and baking cakes for sale,

the children operate as a Greek chorus, asking for stories, asking questions of Hazari Baba, and telling stories about what's happening. At the end, her husband dead from the drinking, Mrs. D'Sa becomes independent and prepares to leave for Canada.

Minus one child, who died from an illness and the bad advice given by the second Mrs. Naranbhai over how to cure the illness, the same woman who gave bad advice (so people believe) about how to cure the madness of Kirti. When the baby died, the whole community rallied round the D'Sas. Yes, after all, it was a community.

Near the end of the novel, the twinless twin god turns up in a parcel for Naranbhai, which his wife Bimla opens after his death before the TV set: and it has been sent back by Kitty Complex, Kirti, who had taken the god for good luck, and who is to say she had not found good luck through the Bollywood movie? And by the way, both Kamla and Baby occupy *Bombay Gardens*: the novel.



CREDITS

Peter,

That's a very good understanding of the novel. But it is important to explain a few more things and not just state them. For example, how Geeta tried to poison Kirti and got poisoned herself.

Jameela



Jameela,

Okay, I will explain. Hazari Baba turns up (in the novel)) to give people what they need, and sometimes what they ask for. Geeta Naranbhai decides that she has to get rid of her rival, Sushilaben, by getting rid of her daughter, and this she does when she discovers from Hazari Baba when that the queen of the night flower that is used by Shahbanu for its beautiful scent and its attractiveness can also be used as a poison for which there is no cure. He cautions her when she asks him about it: and she paves the way for her own

death. She puts the poison into the milk she kindly prepares and gives Sushilaben to give Kirti. She does not know why Kirti remains alive and doubles the poison. Of course, after she faints (when Naranbhai is arrested and taken to prison), Sushilaben gives her milk apparently to make her recover. This is what kills her. We realize Sushilaben must have been throwing the doctored milk out. So Geeta was responsible for her own destruction. Hazari Baba had warned her, in veiled tones, that these things can sometimes miss their target!

One more thing needs to be said about Jannasani the servant. The novel suggests that he was probably named “Johnson” by his previous employers, a European family. This reminds me of Joyce Cary’s novel, *Mister Johnson*. Unlike Cary’s character, Jannasani only appears to be very obedient, dependent and discreet. But he is playing a game and hiding his real feelings because he wants to survive and to help his family. He brings a nephew of his, Juma, to the house to help him after giant ants destroy the village (he says). It is this relative who is given the task of looking after the baby Kirti had after just one night of marriage—her husband fled—and it is he who saves her life by taking her to Mama Safia. Juma is also the young boy, later turned soldier, who recognised Kamla in the prison cell although she is unconscious. He returns her to Naran Villa and then loses his life for disobeying orders. He decided to save her because she would steal food to feed him when Mrs. Naranbhai refused to give him evening meals. He feels he owes her.

Jameela,

What would you say to the idea that some of the characters in the novel are racist?

Peter



Peter,

Racism was a fact of life in East Africa (where it was called “racialism”). It was not some evil idea *underlying* thoughts and actions

– it was *upfront*, at every level. Whereas South Africa had out and out Apartheid, East Africa had “unofficial” apartheid, enacted by the British in Kenya and then aped in Uganda. You were born and bred in Uganda and you should know that very few Black Africans could actually live in the cities where the buildings were mostly British or Asian-occupied. The chief role of Africans, particularly in colonial times, was to service their White and Brown Masters. I grew up at a time when nobody would bat an eyelid at the assumption that Blacks were inferior to Browns and Browns to Whites. It was an attitude that shamed me, deeply. And then, when the Expulsion came, at some level I couldn’t help feeling “serves us right!”

Jameela



Jameela,

The reason the General gives for the Expulsion in this novel is different from that in your previous novel and from the one in my novel *The General is Up* (which I believe I took from the real pronouncement by Amin). In your first novel, the Dictator wants to save Zarine from the oppression of her patriarchal system, and he succeeds: she becomes the Dream Teacher in England. Here the Dictator wants the gold and the magic of the Indians which can give one gold and also great sexual potency. He sends soldiers to look for Hazari Baba and to arrest anyone else who looks like he can be a magician. The ones who are not magicians are expelled.

Peter



Peter,

You’ve managed to unravel a fairly complex plot with many different threads. Very creative writing! But let me point out that the way Asians were singled out for Expulsion, just for being Asians, made me take the point to a ludicrous extreme. Amin may have thought they had some special secret for their success. Some special magic. Someone should have told him that they had only the simple notion of hard work, day and night, and no other magic potion. It wasn’t an overnight rags-to-riches story, aided by magic mantras. It was

IN SEARCH OF THE KATARAGAMA GOD

Manuka Wijesinghe

I am fat forty, female, furrowed and fairness an optic illusion.

Hence which able bodied, sighted Sri Lankan male would attempt to pick me up?

Of course there is no logic to erotica; hence an exception is ever likely to happen. But to pick me up; not once, not twice, not three times....but continuously the whole day and the whole night from about four pm until about three in the morning?

I had no hand mirror to double check my appearance. Was I suffering from some strange disease where I assumed I was uglier than I was? Or had the concept of beauty changed during the seven hours I sat in this car which brought me to this location from the city of Colombo?

I walked along the Menik Ganga. 'Hallo? *Kohomadha? Thaniyengda avith inne?*' (Are you here alone?) Filled my ears. I was glad that I was clad from head to toe in a plain shalwar kameez and not in the revealing sexiness of a 'diyareddha'. If so, perhaps I may have been pleasurable raped. The fat, forty, furrowed female fornicated! No thank you. I was yet an old fashioned female. I still liked a bit of foreplay.

I left the banks of the river to another 'Hallo, *Kohomada?*' and sat in the back seat of the car. It was exhausting being erotically pursued. I was not prepared for it. Not here!

sheer hard work, dedication. And it had been at its best when they felt secure in Uganda, when it was felt there was a future worth building, for themselves and subsequent generations. What a different story it would've been if they'd been allowed to stay, and carry on building that future. Instead, and you may not have experienced this because you live in a small mid-western American city, their imaginary magic skills were carried to places like the UK and Canada. I don't know about Canada, but in Britain they certainly transformed the high streets of major cities! Magic indeed!

Jameela



CONCLUSION

Jameela Siddiqi the novelist is demonstrating the power of her words by creating through them the nature and character of the General who orders the Expulsion. She is the one who can dream—and then wake up through the novel. The pen is mightier than the gun! This is the real magic: the power of words in fiction.

THE END



Peter,

How can you just stop there? You have left out many characters, such as Raushan, Naranbhai's chief enemy who was married to an African politician! And what about the fact that Hazari Baba is arrested and thrown into jail? He begins singing, and all the soldiers fall asleep. When other soldiers come for him, he is not there. This is the twin of the story of Rangeelay Khan in present time.

Jameela



Jameela,

Just who is writing this review: Camilla...Jameela...

Peter

FADE OUT

I envisioned the people concerned. All blind men? No. Obvious evidence of sight. Not knocking on persons or parked cars. Handicapped? The limbs were in place. Two arms, two legs and even a head above the shoulders. No strange tics or fits of any sorts. Retarded? Hard to say but it was implausible that a whole town was filled with retarded men the one time I decide to come here in twenty years.

Ah, there I found a hand mirror (I could have looked at the mirror in the car but I did not want the driver to think I was vain), I looked the same. Not the substance of epics and Eros. So what was the explanation?

If retardation, disability and sightlessness were not the issue could it be frustration? Otherwise dear god tell me (and there were no shortage of Gods in this place where I was) why would a twenty year old athletic male body try to pick up a fat forty year old? Was the country not full of slim hipped eighteen year old, sixteen year old, nineteen year old *nangis*?

I decided to tow in with general (majority) frustration since individual analysis was not possible. And not to mention my incapacibilities of infinitesimal analysis!

Most of humanity is frustrated. The housewife is frustrated with her spouse. The husband is frustrated with the wife. The teacher is frustrated with the student, the citizen is frustrated with the politician, the entrepreneur is frustrated with the economy, the Sinhala is frustrated with the Tamil, the Tamil with the Sinhala, the Muslim with the Tamil, Karuna with Prabha, Mahinda with Ranil, the kapurala with the devotee and perhaps the reader with the editor of this magazine. And the list goes on and on...

Hence I conclude that frustration is an inevitable civilizational and societal malady that affects all classes, at all times and nearly at all places. Nearly!!!! Is there no exception? Or rather, should there be no exception?

Here I was at Kataragama. The most holy place in the whole of Sri Lanka and if I am not mistaken in the whole of the southern part of India. This was the holy site where Skanda the son of Lord Shiva came to, all the way from India, vanquished the obnoxious god robbing Padmasura, king of the Asuras (anti gods), enabling the release of all the imprisoned gods that enabled the righteous reign of the gods (suras) again.

Furthermore, this is the place of the greatest love story. A love story of happiness and with a happy ending! This was not a strangely morbid lover's leap or a caste ridden tragedy of Saliya and Asokamala; this was a story book casteless romance. The way love was supposed to be. This was the place where Skanda the son of Lord Shiva, the brother of Lord Ganesh, the son of Parvati, the bearer of the invincible lance (vel), Skanda (Kartikeya, Muruka, Arumugam, Shanmugam) conquered the Asuras and fell in love with the veddha damsel Valli. (Incidentally as a small unromantic footnote it needs to be mentioned that the Lord Skanda had an Indian wife, hence the happy ending is not a part of her love story, but for us Lankans it was a happy story. The son of a god falling for an indigenous daughter from the soil and the mammoty. An ardently uncultivated animist. Yet she succeeded in capturing the heart of the son of one of India's greatest god. And lo behold he never returned to India. Instead lived in romantic bliss of the Kataragama hills.

Kataragama. This is the place young couples come to get married. This is the place people come for blessing. This is the place offerings are made to the gods; this is the place where people come to become ascetic, this is the place pre dating the arrival of the Buddha and yet the holiest place in the whole of Sri Lanka. It is the cross cultural metropolis of the country. The place of the greatest veneration amongst of pilgrims of all religions. The Buddhist is here, the Hindu is here and even the Muslim. Hence why on earth would I be erotically pursued at every corner? Are people not here to revere the gods?

Contemplating from the back seat of the car I dared to venture into the territory of blasphemy and ask myself, 'Is this a place of prostitution or prayer?' I did not answer the question instead opened the door of the car and progressed (on foot) to the Sella Kataragama Devale.

Needless to say the Kataragama devalas do not have the awe inspiring beauty of even the ugliest and the poorest Kovil in Pettah. The Devalas are meagre garishly painted hideous buildings with further garishly painted curtains supposedly representing the deities. They are like sub standard television cartoon emanating the sweet fragrance of incense. All the way to Sella Kataragama (small Kataragama) I was confronted with fluttering Buddhist flags which were far more in abundance than nature. Now what did the Sella Kataragama have to do with Buddhism?

The Sella Kataragama, or the small Kataragama devala is supposed to be located on the spot where Lord Skanda encountered his Valli. Hence the co habitation of Buddhist flags was an enigma. Correct me if I am wrong. I assumed Buddhism to be a non devotional, renouncing, celibate search for the elimination of the deluded mind and final attainment of nirvana through the simple propagation of the soul searching dharma. Hence why on earth would the Buddhist glorify a love affair? Or was the Buddhist flag trying to symbolise something which I had not learnt during my lifetime as a Buddhist?

I wish. Born Sinhala Buddhist I would certainly love a bit of glorification of love than the eternal renunciation of love. But I was no power to mutate a profound philosophy. On the other hand, had the philosophy changed in the seven hours I had spent in this car? Doubtful. Buddhism in this country was as solid as the Adams Peak that didn't crumble when the Buddha put his foot upon it. In that case perhaps it was a silly prank. Or perhaps a simple act of decoration. The Buddhist colours being hung simply for its hues and not for the philosophy. Nothing more and nothing less. Hence, the fluttering of flags, though causing some confusion did not really

bother me. Of course it needs to be mentioned that during the walk to Sella Kataragama I encountered many hallos and *kobomadas*, but I pretended to be deaf and dumb and managed to reach the revered spot without gathering too many disdainful thoughts.

Then before me stood the Sella Kataragama devala. An incongruity upon blessed nature! Garish pink like candy floss. An architectural hideosity. I peered inside and witnessed a kapurala conducting a ceremony in express Sinhala that it sounded like another language. I was rather confused. I thought that the Kataragama god spoke Sanskrit. NO matter, I subdued my critical thoughts. Who was I to think of the language of Gods? If the kapurala spoke express Sinhala, certainly the Kataragama god understood it. But despite the unintelligibility of language causing confusion to my ears, my sight understood that this ceremony was revolving around money. I suckled unto a family, so no one would realise I was a lone pilgrim and held my hands together in veneration. I do not know what I venerated, for seeing this hideous compound and the screeching kapuralas grabbing money from pilgrims and a loudspeakers playing Sinhala pop music (it may have been Bhakti gee, if that is the case it was a pop version of Bhakti gee). I lost all sense of the God and Valli. For a moment I did not know what I was doing there. It would have been far more devotional to go to a Pettah Kovil and save the time, energy, money and excessive erotic stimulation of coming to Kataragama. But I still held my hands together and assumed I had got the wrong end of the stick. Perhaps this was modern veneration of which I did not know much about. Then the loudspeakers blared, the music stopped and amidst this looming silence a voice thanked all the people who had donated money and mentioned how many lakhs it costs to maintain Kataragama, renew the buildings, add new building, modernise the buildings, refurbish the buildings etc etc etc...and pleaded with the people to acquire more 'ping (merit)' by handing donations to the kapuralas assistant seated in the Devala. Not a word was mentioned of the Gods, the power or the piety one hoped to find in a place such as this. I got up and fled. For here in this sporadic vegetation where Valli and Skanda

had met, there was no more romance of the Gods. Only prostitution. Not the prostitution of woman. But the prostitution of religion. There was no Hindu, there was no Brahman, and there was no god....only Sinhala kapuralas doing business surrounded by accessories made in Taiwan. (plastic flowers etc). I had 5 Rupees in my hand for the 'Panduru pettiya' (donation box), I put it back in my hand bag. I would not spend a cent in this place.

Disillusioned I went towards the main Kataragama complex. The road outside was one big '*karachchalee* (cacophony)'. A giant bazaar of vattis and lotteries! There were 'tri shaws' as prizes, there were plastic guns being sold, plastic dolls, sunglasses, caps, watches apples, grapes, vattis ranging from 350 to 1000 Rupees and a whole lot more which were certainly not in the itinerary of necessary pre requisites for the gods. Needless to say, I bought nothing. I was convinced of my devotion. I did not think that Lord Kataragama would be offended if I did not offer to him yet another vatti full of fruit. Instead I gave ten rupees to the beggar outside and even went to the extent of buying some holy ash from a little boy for the five rupees I did not put into the 'panduru pettiya'. Of course it was not the holy ash I felt sorry for but the little enterprising boy who was around the same age as my own son. In the midst of the multitude I entered the complex.

The pilgrims were a unique conglomeration of people. Needless to say there were more Sinhala than Tamils, and from these Sinhalese I observed, I would dare to say that a majority were here for a trip rather than a pilgrimage. Outside in the car park Baila music was played from a loud speaker and Sinhala boys were gyrating and shaking their hips to 'piti kotapan none...piti kotapan none...'. Policeman stood around watching and the Buddhist priests ambled by. The Hindu ascetic probably did not notice, for he was engrossed in devotion. I was personally horrified. Not because I dislike the Baila, I love it. But even my liberal education could not pardon the sight of 'Baila' and 'bajaw' in religious proximity.

Is this the sad state of the nation? If the Buddhist desires to make a capitalist venture of an ancient Hindu or even pre Hindu cult, cannot it be carried out with respect? Dignity? Hanging Buddhist flags is not dignity. It is indignity. Except the Buddha having made a hypothetical visit to the vicinities of Kataragama there is no evidence of his person. Cannot the Buddhist appreciate the cult of the Kataragama god without impregnating it with his own puritanical ignorance. I am a Buddhist. I can yet worship the Kataragama god and trust his omnipresence. I did not come here to fulfil a vow or receive the blessing for a new car I had purchased. I came in veneration. I barely saw a venerating Sinhala. Either they were busy fulfilling vows, having new merchandise blessed or they were here for entertainment. Baila dancing on the banks of the Menik ganga was not a sign of respect. The Hindus were different. It was evident that they had not come for the trip but came in veneration of the joyous union between the Lord Kataragama and the Veddha girl Valli.

I ventured to the devalas. I had no pooja vatti, no coconuts, no joss sticks, no camphor. I had my hands held together in veneration. I had no chance to pay my respects to these gods painted on the curtains. For wherever I stood in the vicinity of a devale deity (concealed behind curtains) I was nearly raped by the kapuralas demanding money. If I stood in the vicinity of the devale they should shout 'come come'. I have never experienced this in a Hindu Kovil. These men were not men of worship or devotion they were like mudalalis in Kiribathgoda.

As I walked around the compound again, it was an eternal case of someone trying to get fresh with me. By now, seeing these prostituting kapularas even the hilariousness of young men following my fat and forty frame had ceased to amuse me. I was full of disgust. I had to abide my time till the Perehera ended.

Not finding a place to stay until such time (meaning that I was eternally addressed by strange males) and of course nearly deafened

by the music and the Dhammapada being blasted through the bad speakers, I walked into the compound of the mosque. It was a silent place. I was amazed at the multitude of Muslims in the compound though I had seen no obvious Muslims in the devalas. Obviously they had their own veneration here. Not for the Kataragama god, but for whatever sages and deities they may have had. There is no reason to condemn this act. For they were not obnoxious – but merely seeking their own resting place in this venerated spot where their nations brethren – the Sinhala and the Hindus come to worship. It was a perfectly acceptable and understandable. They annoyed no one. I stayed in this quiet place – only disturbed by the sound of voices until the perehera began. Couple of people tried to speak to me – not necessary in an erotic framework – but I could not communicate. I spoke no Tamil. The hours went by slowly. Occasionally a stranger – seeing my loneliness – would bring me a cup of coffee or a cup of sweet tea. It enabled me to stay awake. They asked for no money. I felt more reverence and religious spirit in this compound belonging to the Muslims rather than the devalas run by my own kinsmen. It was a sad realisation.

Sometimes in the course of the night the perehera began. The Muslim lady sitting near me took me to the front to the mosque complex where her husband stood up on seeing me and I was given the place on the ground where he was seated. I had barely communicated with them, but they understood piety and they possessed compassion. They had understood the religious mission. They were the true pilgrims.

Then the Perehera began. Since I was seated near the mosque I had a perfect vision of the Valli Amma devala where the final veneration was held by the perehera performers. The elephants did their duty to perfection. The Kavadi and other Tamil dancing was absolutely brilliant. When they danced in front of the Valli amma Devala it was evident that each and every dancer was doing his or her bit of veneration to the woman who captured the heart of the god.

Then the Kandyan dancers – and the greatest disaster arrived! I do not know where they had been hired from. Where ever it may have been they were certainly not from an institute of dancing. More like an institute of scarecrows upon the paddy fields. I have studied Kandyan dancing and I was greatly distressed that persons in this perehera dared to insult our great Sinhala culture by daring to perform their scarecrow postures in public. I do not say it is an insult to the gods. For, from the gods they have obviously understood nothing. Or else they would not dare to perform like this in front of a god. I go a step below and say it was an insult to being Sinhala. They made nothing but a mockery of the regal dance form of this country. Our pride. If we cannot perform even our culture to perfection, dear god tell me how are we to perform another culture to perfection? As in the case of the Sinhala rulership of Kataragama?

Waiting for the next episode I pondered on their plight. Perhaps I am wrong – but my belief is that none of these Sinhala people venerate either the god Kataragama, Valli or anything of the romantic episode that is supposed to have occurred in Kataragama. They are here only to fulfil vows since Buddhism has given them no person that can carry out this burden. Hence why bother with the perfection of dance? Why venerate the gods with dance? Why try to impress gods? For, at the bottom of it all, it is only vow fulfilling that is important – not the veneration of the god. It was a culture of egoism. I, me, mine....the importance of the God being attached to the price of the Vatti. Rupees three hundred or a thousand?

Thousand. I get more 'ping'.

Then the final phase: A face covered kapurala comes upon a decorated elephant holding a secret 'something' covered by a multitude of garlands and flowers. This secret something is taken to the Valli amma devala. The Muslims sit and watch silently. The Hindus shout 'haro hara' banging their heads on the ground and the Buddhists shout 'Saadhu saadhu saa'. The Basnayake Nilames' friends and acquaintances' who are dressed in chaste whiteness of

poya day and religious attire, are permitted to stand around the entrance of the Valli amma devala while the rest of humanity is barred behind barriers and policemen. As the Yantra of the Kataragama god and Valli meet – indicating their union, they slowly take their hands together, cover their faces and grin.....What on earth is happening here?

Saadhu saadhu saa...

Is this worship? Or was it a trip sponsored by the Basnayake Nilame and other Buddhist political dignitaries who seem to think that the practice of politics in this country is naturally related to televised religious ritual? An enterprising relative, sister or friend of the Nilame committee hurriedly went around giving money to the pall bearers. Grinning and thanking. Nothing was free.

Everything ended and the crowds dispersed. I waited on to see the continuation of the religious ceremonies in the mosque. Around two am I made my way back to the rest house. Of course a few tired 'hallos' and '*kobomadas*' followed me. I was beyond the point of irritation. I was full of disgust. I had come to this place to feel the power of ritual, to feel the presence of a God but all I saw was lecherous men and the prostitution of religion. I decided never to return.

Why could we Buddhists not leave Kataragama to the Hindus and concentrate with the perfection of Buddhism. In which sermon did the Buddha ever ask us to worship the Kataragama deity? Perhaps I missed that one.

I have been to many Hindu temples, but never has a swami forced me to do a Pooja, never has he said 'come, come, come', never has he announced over a loudspeaker how much it costs him to maintain a temple. He has treated me with cordiality and refinement. He was not my devotee, but the devotee of the God. He was only there to communicate between me and the God.

A few days later I visited my friend who had accompanied over me the years in my journey of faith and made me a believer in many rather than the disbeliever of one. He had initiated my visit to Kataragama. I asked him, 'Where on earth is this God you are talking about? All I heard and saw were lecherous humans either in the quest for flesh or quest of financial gain. There is no religion' He smiled at me in loving condescension. I was still too engrossed in the material to see beyond. Quietly he said: 'The God only comes for that mornings' Pooja – thereafter he returns to the forest for meditation. He does not return. Do not be deterred by trivialities. Go back next year. I will tell you when the God is there.' May he live in tranquillity, my friend.

MEASURED

In Memoriam: Reggie Siriwardena

Indran Amirthanayagam

On a sun-bleached lane,
flanked by orange and lemon trees,
in the middle of a slow-sipped
afternoon I conjure Reggie
translating Machado.

For years I returned
to the island to fill bags
with new poems and stories
by this spare intellectual
who fought to be classless,

who ordered my poems
and built me a house
on the map of a land
whose names have changed,
whose shoreline's roughed up,

whose people have fled
and dragged themselves back
in the undertow, beside themselves
with joy on seeing the familiar
white bulbs open behind barricades

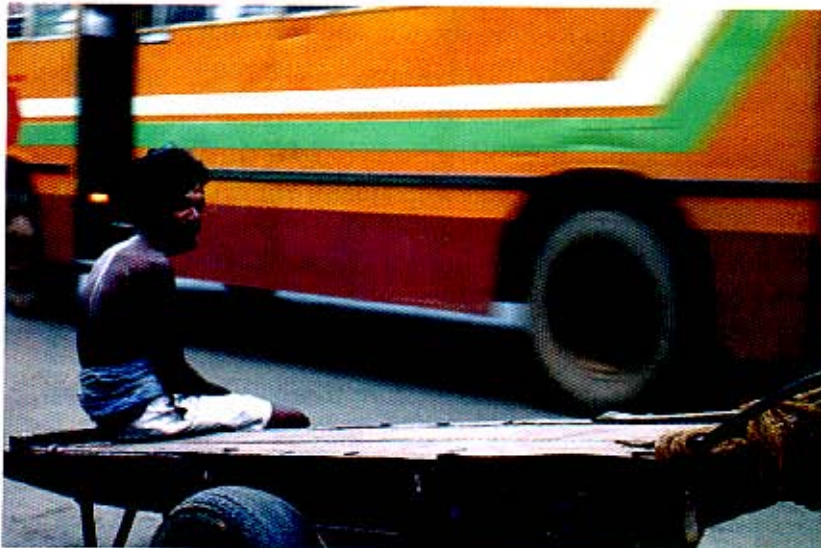
to cast their aphrodisiacs
and unravel the most stitched
consciences. Reggie,
one of our original liberators,
I leave you these words

framed by ocean and lagoon,
under king coconut and banyan,
decorum and decree, I leave you
my translations of the general chaos
in Siriwardena-measured verse.

January 8, 2007

FRANGIPANI

Tanya Uluwitiya



Alefiya Akberally

She stood by the window and looked out into the garden where the frangipani tree had blossomed red and luscious. She loved to walk through the interconnecting rooms in the house and take in the texture of the furniture as they languished in the varied moods of the changing sun. The fresh scent of apples that she had placed in an open glass bowl on the dining room table seems to walk with her as she moved from room to room.

She had taken a shower and droplets of water had soaked the back of her cotton blouse leaving her skin feeling cool. It was at these times when she was completely relaxed that he would love her. He would place his hand on her back where she would feel it searing her skin through the material of the blouse. The tip toeing fingers as he reached up inside the hem of the blouse and touched her naked skin. Gooseflesh crawling up her arms and legs. Her breath catching on fire.

He would love her with the energy of a man who had discovered the center of the universe. The very origin of life. Their bodies would merge, skin on skin, supple and smooth. Every atom of their bodies racing towards that one center where they would meet completely and unabashedly. Then she would hold onto him and take in the scent of his skin between the collarbones where she would sink her small teeth in to his flesh.

"Narendra..." It was almost a whisper.

She looked down at her feet and the contrasting colour of the polished cement floor. She let her body guide her to its destination within the house. Her feet led her to the sea blue door of their bedroom. Pushing down on the brass handle she noticed the cold

steely feel of the metal in her hand. A familiar smell greeted her; sandalwood and Indian jasmine. Scents they had both agreed on, when the idea of their bedroom was just a dream in the minds of two young lovers. She sat on the bed and ran her hand over the bed sheet. It was neat and smooth. Accusing. She let her head sink into the soft pillow and closed her eyes and waited.

Silence. She could hear her own breathing in rhythm to an unknown beat that she felt was a creation of the house itself. A lump in her throat and she could feel a teardrop sliding down her cheek, like a warm insect. She could hear the quiet sound it made as it fell onto the pillow only to be absorbed greedily by the dry cloth. Silence.

She wanted to break the silence that seemed suddenly oppressive. A crystal vase lay on top of the night table, a wedding gift from a distant aunt. She wanted to throw it at the opposite wall and hear the sound of the glass exploding as it hit the solid surface of the wall. Crash!

"I am like a cat" She said talking aloud, her voice somehow seeming to be not her own.

She waited. Time seemed to travel in parallel to her heart beat. Her pulse ringing in her ear. Her mind shutting down individual doors, closing pathways.

An echoing click through the house and the sound of brass hinges protesting. She stood up, startled. Panic rising in waves. Jumping out of bed she walked toward the living room.

She stopped short at the entrance to the living room from the corridor.

"Narendra" She could not hear her own words. He had not seen her yet. His back was turned toward her. Suddenly he seemed taller than she had remembered. Almost unreachable. She walked towards him/Her feet with a life of its own.

"Naren"

She thought that he had stopped breathing when he heard her voice. He stood with his back still to her. Every muscle tense, waiting for the next move.

She placed the tips of her fingers on his back, letting only the slightest pressure to be felt. Her body ached to embrace him but her mind protested.

He turned on his heels suddenly, upsetting her balance and she felt her body tilting backward in an uncontrollable spiral. *Fall to the ground. Fall!* Her mind raced, a flash of lighting in a warm afternoon sky. Suddenly she was no longer falling. Her body caught in mid air.

"Where did you go?" she asked, her voice like a child's.

"Nowhere."

"What do you mean ,nowhere?"

"Nothing."

They both sat on the bed, with their backs to each other.

"I waited for you. Waited..." she stopped.

"I know."

"You know?"

"Yes."

"Then why?"

"I don't know."

She wanted to turn around and touch him. To feel that he was real. Smell the skin between his collar bones, right where she could feel his pulse.

Then he turned around and touched her shoulder. She could feel his fingers digging into her flesh, the pressure increasing.

"You're hurting me." she said, her hand instinctively moving towards his.

"YOU are hurting me."

"What are you talking about?" She pried open his fingers one by one but like a stubborn child he held onto her shoulder, unwilling to let go.

She looked at his face now for the first time since he came into the house. He looked tired. Rings had formed around his eyes and his usually neat hair was disheveled.

"Let go of my shoulder!" she said gathering strength.

He did not respond. His eyes seemed to bore into her face, taking in every detail. Caressing eyes.

She could feel a lump forming in her throat and she was not ready to yield to it yet.

Now with both hands he held her face bringing it closer to his. She could feel his hands burning into her flesh.

"What are you trying to do?" She was suddenly afraid now. Her pulse raced and she could feel beads of sweat trickling down her back, soaking her blouse.

"Naren!"

His lips were on hers. Biting and urgent. She could feel her breath being sucked out of her as he almost seemed to want to take in her very essence. She took in air through her nose in great gulps, choking. "YOU are hurting me" He said, his voice seeming to break under a great weight.

She could taste the metallic of blood in her mouth. He touched her mouth with his fingers, running them over gently where he had bit hard into her lower lip.

"What did we do wrong? You and me. This is our house. Where did you go last night?"

"Nowhere."

"What do you mean? You must have gone somewhere."

"I just drove around in the car. In circles. Thought I was never going to stop. I had no control over my destiny."

"I thought you were never going to come home."

"I thought the same too." He said and looked at her face, waiting for her reaction.

"So why did you come back?"

"I don't know."

They both stood at the bedroom window. The frangipani tree looked different in the changing sunlight as it slipped quietly through the garden. Red frangipani blossoms had fallen around the tree forming a floral circle.

"I love this tree." He said.

"So do I Naren. You know that."

"Do I?" He said turning towards her.

"What do you mean? I don't understand you! You are hiding something from me!" she screamed, her voice shrill.

She felt like she was drowning, the cloying smell of the frangipani blossoms crowding her senses. She clung desperately to the vertical metal bars that had been fixed as protection against thieves. What is there to protect anymore she thought. All that was precious was lost.

"You are not the person I fell in love with. You are not that girl. I can't find her anymore. You are obsessed with this house and that's all you really want" She could hear him say, his voice like the distant tinny voice on the phone.

She looked towards the direction of his voice and saw him standing near the bed. His face contorted. Sad.

"But I thought that this house was important to you as well. Remember how we thought of exactly how it would look like once we build it. We shared a dream Naren and we made it come true. It was OUR work. OUR dream."

"No."

"What?"

"No. Its not OUR dream. Our dream was to have a family, not a house. Our dream was to have a home. There is no specific place for that. It can be anywhere."

"THIS is our home." She said her fists balled up and her thumbs digging into her palms.

"This is YOUR home."

Her legs could no longer support her and she sat on the ground. He squatted next to her. Concern written over his face.

"Radha, are you alright?" Urgent concern in his voice.

"Im fine." She said limply. "I'm ok."

"I have to leave in two days time. I want you to come with me. I have bought the tickets, everything is ready. You just have to get onto the plane. hats all."

She was crying now, her shoulders hunched as she struggled to fight with her emotions. A child in the woman's body. With her hand she reached under the bed and felt the smooth glossy cover of a magazine. She pulled it out.

The magazine cover contained a bright, spectacular photograph of a fish. It seemed ominous to her eyes.

She remembered how she had thrown it under the bed last evening, the smooth sound as it slid on the polished floor. Swish! And under the bed. Their bed.

"You and these fish! These blood thirsty fish!" She was angry now. Her pulse was racing, her heart a thumping automaton. Will it stop beating? Now.

"Go live with your fish. Your damn Piranhas. That's all you care about!"

"That's my job." His voice a sharp razor of ice. "I need to study them in their natural habitat. It's important to me. My research."

"I don't want to go to some far off country. Into some jungle and spend two years of my life away from all the people I love."

"How can you ask that from me?" she said, her eyes looking at his. Searching for clarity.

"I thought you loved me enough to realize that this research is important for me. Home is where WE are Radha! Don't you realize that!"

"This is our home. And this is where..." She stopped, remembering. She had forgotten someone.

"Where what? What's going on Radha?" He had grabbed her by the shoulders and started shaking her.

"Stop! Stop doing that!" She screamed. Her voice breaking and choking.

He stopped shaking her but did not take his hands away. Beads of sweat had trickled down his temples and onto his cheeks. They looked like tears she thought.

"The baby, Naren."

"What baby?" He said perplexed and then suddenly a jolt of realization.

"You're pregnant!"

"Yes." A simple inferno fanfare, no crowds cheering, just their anger.

He sat down in front of her/His face expressionless.

She placed her hand on his head, only the finger tips. And waited.

Silence. Waiting for acceptance.

Outside the sun had set and the frangipani could only be seen in silhouette. Its blossoms no longer revealing their colour. In the oppressive quiet she thought she heard the soft sound of a flower falling to the ground, reaching its ultimate destiny.

It was only their breathing and the sound of some unknown who was yet to breathe. The house seemed to be waiting for life.

He lifted her hand from his head. *Move away the hand. Move. No! Don't! Please!*

And placed it on his lips. She touched his lips tracing the lines feeling an urge to kiss him between his collar bones and take him in.

"Do you know which organ of its prey the piranha's love to savour?"

"No. I don't."

"It's the heart."

"Oh. I didn't know that."

"You should."

"Yes, I should."

The scent of frangipani wafted in through the open windows. Delicate fingers of scent dancing around them, warm and inviting.

DEATHWISH

Sashi Premawardene

I am stuck inside this body
 Unable to break through
 It's suffocating me bit by bit
 I feel like
 Unscrewing my head
 And keeping it on the table
 So that it can stop thinking
 Hurting
 Feeling
 Waiting to die
 I can feel the second hand of the clock
 Ticking vociferously
 The sound is slow
 And laborious
 One tick
 And then a lifetime between the tock
 Why are the days so long?
 Why is it filled up with
 things that don't bring joy in doing?
 Just dutifully breathing in and out
 Pumping in blood
 To keep alive a heart
 That is already dead
 It's like having an incurable disease
 And no euthanasia

To end it all
 Given no choice
 In a body that isn't mine
 soul is struggling
 For my freedom
 But I have been condemned
 To continue
 The motions of life
 The end could be tomorrow
 So happily close
 Or 50 years from now
 Not knowing how long
 Is just as painful as seeing you dead
 Like wanting your head to explode and end it all
 But knowing it just won't do that by itself
 Stuck to your head
 The body continues its weary existence
 Slowly, trudging to meet an unknown deadline
 This is my fear of the unknown
 When will be it time for me to shake this case and be
 free?

BAREFOOT

Sashi Premawardene

The wet mud
Creeps through the grass
And sticks between the toes
Black brown earth
In my garden
Feels me
As I walk
The lawn
As if
It was a great adventure
In the Sinharaja
I walk about
Barefoot
Speaking to my mother's potted plants
Making a sudden mad dash at the garden lizard
Who suffers a mild cardiac arrest
At my oncoming frame
Or so I believe
Look at the fella run...
He he he
My mother shakes her head in disbelief
"she's gone mad"
she says to my father who grins
and joins me
in our very own private little jungle
walking about
barefoot
the city seems
far removed
from my being...
Image



Alefiya Akherally



Alefiya Akberally

WAR HAIKU

Vivimarie van der Poorten

1. Sound of Combat

gun shots are soundless
The blood-shattered landscape screams
loud is death's silence

2. Lebanon, July 2006

Housemaids return home
From the flames of Lebanon
to poverty's blaze

3. For Henrietta, May 2006

Spared by the harsh sea
you reached out for happiness
and grabbed a landmine

4. All is fair

Kids play with real guns
Adults toy with children's lives
All is fair in war
Image

BURIAL

Vivimarie van der Poorten

It was raining hard
yesterday, when we buried
the dog.
he had died in the early hours
before sunrise
and lay as though asleep
except for the
rigid outstretched paws.
Old age, everyone at home said,
for they had known him
since he was born.
I, newcomer, wife/daughter-in-law
had only just grown
to love him,
so there was no comfort there.

He was just an ordinary brown
but proud
and hadn't welcomed me with energetic smiles
as my in-laws did
but was skeptical
and eyed me cautiously
with no hint of a wagging tail.

He took his time to know me
and unencumbered by the need for pretence
or hypocrisy
he one day admitted,
by wagging his tail and yelping when I returned from work,
that I'd won his doggy heart

Since then he was a companion
and imposed only one rule on me:
I could not go for a walk
without him.
It was an easy rule to follow
and I never needed to prove to him
that I was anything else
but my flawed and complicated self.

The pit was hard to dig
because the earth in the filled-up land
was hard and rocky despite the rain
and soaked to the bone,
I shivered as my husband and I
lowered him in an old
sheet into his shallow grave
My sister-in-law
brought her kids over
to participate in the ritual
because they had never seen anything
dead before.
Wide-eyed, in two little
raincoats they watched and asked
where the dog had gone
or if he was only sleeping.
As I placed red and yellow flowers on his grave
I was glad
I wasn't the one expected
to answer that.

MY SKY HAS NO RAINBOWS

Hariharasharma



Alefiya Akberally

I started to count the holes on the wall...large and small. That one...that large one...must be from a big shell piece. Other smaller ones may be from the bullet shots...or may be from small but dangerous shell fragments. My Thambi died because of such a small piece of shrapnel – so tiny yet terrifying. The windowpane was violently removed from its place, and now a clear view of outside is visible from here. Yet only a little bit of light comes from it. I helplessly tried to avoid the vision of the bloodstained walls...and miserably fail, every time I do so... Because it's our own building...the only and last shelter for Amma and me. My heart deserved green, yellow, red – oh the garden with all types of colors in it – now there's only a wilted tree standing there. That was hell... we visited our home during the temporary ceasefire. The garden where we played together, turned into a barren land with only plenty of landmines buried in it. We used to bury seeds there. As memories began to flow, my body felt a sudden chillness. I felt a quiver of chillness, too sweet to bear – just like the memories.

Memories about my Dada, Puppy, Thambi, and his butterflies... Oh, those greeny days. Like a dream, images are moving in my head. It's very funny you know, Dada used to say that the rain is the tears of fairies – he told me they were crying out of extreme joy, the delight that came from seeing children playing happily and praying to the gods regularly. Thambi always countered with questions about thunder – why is there thunder? Dada often changed



Alefiya Akherally

the subject soon after this question. Now it's raining. Do fairies cry seeing me helpless, lonely and caged? Who knows? I only felt an urge to cry.

Amma has gone to the co-operative shop. It is the only way to get food items since all the shops on the peninsula have run out of stock. I felt a great fear at the sudden realization of the fact that I'm alone in this building. Amma forgot to take the umbrella with her. It stands there like an old man. It belonged to daddy. Amma carefully protected it and carried it everywhere we ran. It's raining. I'm feeling hungry. This morning the boiled manioc was not enough for my stomach. Amma ate three pieces of it with scraped coconut. Manioc is the only food item we can afford. She gave the rest of it to me. With heavy feelings of hunger, I ate all of it. She looked at me with a pitying and sad look in her eyes. I felt guilty. That was a humiliating moment. I'm still guilty at the thought that Amma may be feeling even more terribly hungry.

Amma had wanted me to come with her but I refused. She wanted me to help her to carry the things from the co-operative shop. I carefully avoid being seen with her. She doesn't have any ornaments to wear. She wears a torn sari. And above all, she had sobbed to get things at the shop. She had lost her 'Displaced' certificate. So the manager refused to give out the goods free of charge. She went on sobbing, telling the crowd about the miserable life we lead now. Gradually Amma is turning into a beggar. I had watched all of that with humiliation, wanting to escape from there. It was like a suffocating hell. Co-operatives are the only hope. Last week the co-operative also ran out of stock – so we had to pass the week with mangoes as our morning breakfast. We drank sugarless plain tea with a dash of jaggery.

At first I refused to take it, I demanded Dosai, Idly, and Uppumaa. Amma hit me with the thin poovarasu cane until I agreed to eat the mangoes. I wept a lot and she tried to calm me down with her soothing words. But I continued to insist that I was not satisfied

with the mangoes. She slapped herself on her own head violently. Crying. Calling out all the gods' names. I watched her with fear. I cried loudly to stop her from dying. She sat at the corner and sobbed all that night. I fell fast asleep. That night I dreamed of those old days. In my dream appeared my home with its glorious colourful garden, where we used to play while smelling the seductive aroma of the Dosai Amma was cooking in the kitchen. Making the Dosai was a festival in itself. The celebrations would begin as early as one day before the Cooking-Dosai-Day. GrindingMixingBlending. We all watched the process, eagerly listening to the stories about Moon, Jungle and everything we love. Amma is really an expert at relating stories. Her voice is very dreamy and pitch-perfectly effective when it comes to enacting those well-loved stories. The next morning, we placed ourselves in the kitchen, listening to the 'zoiining' sound of the Dosai batter being poured on the hot pan. The scent of ghee filled the air...Thambi busied himself making facemasks in the cooked Dosai. I, being the elder, was roaming there and here as if I was engaged in some important task. In the morning I saw her sari was my new bedsheet.

...to be more precise, it must be three years since the last time I saw any Dosai.

I heard people describing us as 'nuisances,' and they even called Amma another 'cockroach' in our area. This humiliation constantly takes place. Yesterday, the landlord came and shouted that the rent should be paid immediately. His filthy remarks angered even me. Amma pleaded with him to have patience. She literally prayed to him, lowering her voice, maybe fearing that others – or even I – could hear her. He continued to insist repeatedly, but eventually went away. I ran away to the backyard, fearing that Amma was going to do something – something that made me fearful. When I returned to the house, I saw her sitting in the dark corner with an empty look in her eyes. I noticed her ears were missing her earrings – the last piece of gold she had.

Stains, bloodstains everywhere, I can't escape seeing them. I wanted to sleep, but it's thundering. I want Amma, my bedsheet and a song to sing me to sleep. Nowadays, Amma is telling me that she has forgotten all the lyrics and stories. Her voice – a voice we all loved once – has become noticeably hard. I recall her sweet voice, which sang us bedtime rhymes and lullabies. I recall her tender patting that would help us to sleep, and close my eyes.

With eyes closed I hear the wind blowing. It sings. In which language does it sing? Who knows? I wake up to the voice of somebody crying nearby. This is very common. Amma has told me to not open the door unless it was her. It's not raining now. There is a thin ray of light coming into the darkness through the hole in the roof. The sun is visible right now. I thought, soon Amma will come. It's really been a long time since she went out. The smell of rainwater and sweat coming into my nose, and I want to escape...oh these bloodstained walls.

I open the door to get some fresh air and light. Rainwater dropping from the veempu tree standing there green but lonely. The rain refreshes the green all around this house. It's a pleasure to see such a sight. I want to walk in that grass to get a cooling walk. But there is the *beware-of-mines* sign. I stand there expecting Amma. When it rains, look for the rainbow – Amma used to say. I look at the sky searching for the rainbow. I see clouds forming again. There is no rainbow. The street is also deserted. I am beginning to be afraid...Amma, Amma – won't you come back? 'BOOMB...' Must be a claymore...because the noise was so loud. I shudder at the fact that I am alone in this building. I begin to hear intense firing. My legs become rooted to the spot, and I am able to sense my whole body trembling with fear. Footsteps. Footsteps everywhere. Almost everybody is carrying a gun. I close my eyes. Amma.

28.August .2006 - 2.30a.m



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REPORT

GENDERING THE TSUNAMI: **WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES FROM SRI LANKA**

Neloufer de Mel
Kanchana N. Ruwanpura

International Centre for Ethnic Studies

BOMBAY GARDENS

Peter Nazareth



IN SEARCH OF THE KATARAGAMA GOD

Manuka Wijesinghe



MEASURED

In Memoriam: Reggie Siriwardena

Indran Amirthanayagam



DEATHWISH

Sashi Premawardene



BAREFOOT

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WAR HAIKU

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FRANGIPANI

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MY SKY HAS NO RAINBOWS

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EVERYDAY HEROES

Alefiya Akberally