

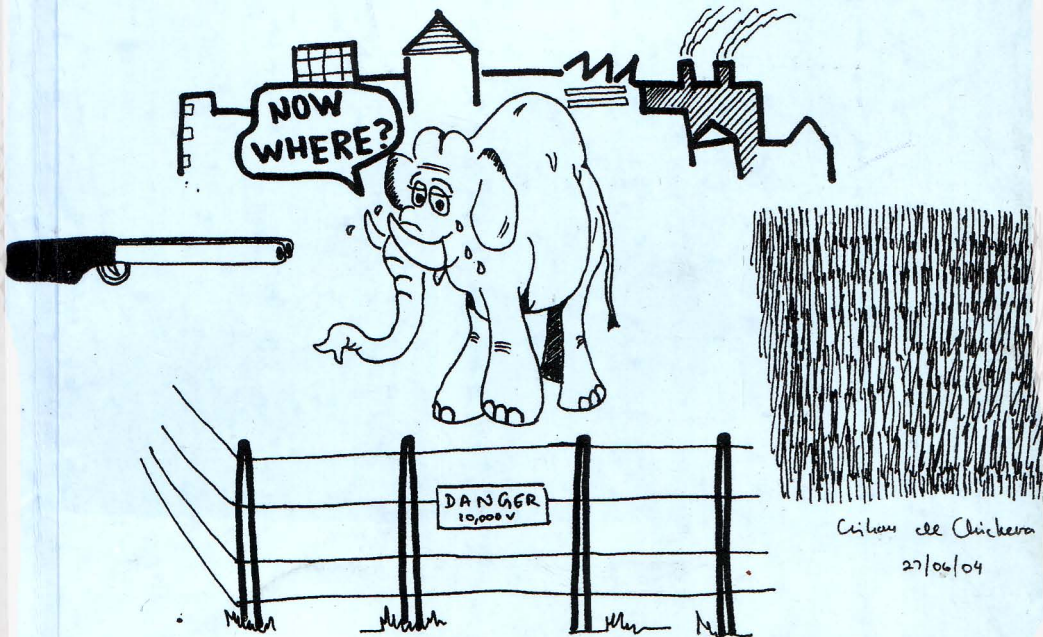
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Nēthrā

A non-specialist journal for lively minds

SRI LANKAN ELEPHANT



INTERNATIONAL CENTRE FOR ETHNIC STUDIES, COLOMBO

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Nēthrā

**Editor
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International Centre for Ethnic Studies, Colombo

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As the year 2005 dawned, we here in Sri Lanka were coming to terms with the Tsunami that hit much of South and South East Asia on December 26th 2004. It was a horrific catastrophe and one, which, we will take a long time to recover from. However, for me, one of the most heartening consequences was the immense expression of help and support that came from within Sri Lanka, with all communities joining hands to reach out to anyone in need. I understand that this might seem a strange observation to make and yet if one was aware of the socio-political times we had been living in just prior to the Tsunami, it is relevant to say that the spontaneous response of the Sri Lankan people made me renew my own faith in their humanity. This issue of *Nethra* does not deal with the Tsunami, instead we shall be putting out a special issue in April that will deal with relevant and yet diverse aspects that the people of Sri Lanka had to face post Tsunami.

In 2004 when the French Government banned all overt religious symbols from secular institutions, a worldwide furor was raised especially in the Muslim world. *Mariah Lukmanjee* examines an alternative analysis of this event. *Mangalika de Silva* explores the lives of women in conflict-ridden regions of Sri Lanka and examines the idea of peace and what it constitutes in these territories. We have poems from the sophisticated pen of *Jean Arasanayagam* and *Ariyawansa Ranaweera's* verse has a note of yearning and plaintive complaint. Our two short stories could not be more different from each other, the first a short piece by *Mahangu Weerasinghe* deals with a war widow's emotion on the day of her husband's funeral, the other is a long short story where *Rosemary Alles* crafts a beautiful yet disturbing tale of childhood.

Finally we have Gehan de Chickera's wonderful cartoons and *Ambika Satkunanathan's* perceptive book review of short stories from Sri Lanka's Plantation sector.

Had this been any other year, I would have wished you a Happy New Year; this year however, I wish you the strength and courage to overcome any and all adversity.

Ameena Hussein

Veiling & other stories

Mariah Lukmanjee

If you were to travel by road from Abbottabad to Rawalpindi you would also drive past Havelian and Haripur. Just a little off the main road there is a small little village known as *Khota' Kabar* 'Ass's Grave'.

Once upon a time, tucked away in the mountainous region of the Himalayas there began a local movement against the Colonial rule. To counter the resistance the British who were hoping to flush out the fighters fairly soon, cut off supplies and road links to the area. Instead when they were met with resilience, it was a surprise. The findings of the investigation showed that the militia fighters had been receiving supplies from the villages in the plains.

The neighbouring people of the plains, who supported the movement, were villagers of poor means. Their capacity for action was limited, and further restricted by the meagre resources that they could lend to the movement. These people owned very little of which could be useful for a struggle, save for the ingenious use of an ass that became instrumental in the war against the British. This particular donkey was familiar with the passage to the remote villages in the mountains. And so every night the ass was loaded with food, and what ever supplies that these villagers could muster was smuggled to the mountains. Replenished, the fighters were able to continue their opposition to the British troops for quite a long time.

An officer of the British army gave orders to kill the ass.

There is a small shrine that marks *Khota's* grave.

¹ An ass, a foolish person, stupid; an idiot

Geographically *Khota Kabar* is located near the plains at the foothills of the Lower Himalayan mountain range. *Khota Kabar* does not really feature on maps but the place and the name is alive in the vernacular sense of history, location and geography. The services rendered by *Khota* are fondly remembered to this day. At the time the ass was given a formal burial ceremony and a small shrine marked the grave. *Khota Kabar* lives on as a symbol of resistance to imperialism.²

The French law banning all large overt religious signs from secular institutions such as schools, and courts, came into effect September 02, 2004. The pro ban legislators insist that the law is aimed at maintaining multi ethnic and racial harmony and at upholding France's secular values. This law came into effect amid fears of raising religious fundamentalism all over the world. Large symbols of religion include the headscarf worn by Muslim women, Jewish skull caps, large crosses and the Sikh turban. This law, which affects 12 million school children, leads the President of the country Jacques Chirac to believe that it is necessary to preserve the secularity of the French state. The law also applies to teachers, and many other countries taking France's lead are proposing to adopt a similar law in the effort to curb religious fanaticism. The ban has already been adopted in Singapore, Germany, and Denmark, and is under going legislative procedure in Belgium.

The legislators seem to have over looked certain details. What is normally acknowledged as religious symbols, are also symbols of religious identity. With time they not only remain signs of observance but also become signifiers of faith, faith that has everything to do with the collective identity of a community. This also becomes the site where cultural symbols serve as symbols of distinctiveness and unity for individual communities.

What happens when cultural symbols are conflated with religious identity and instances where it is very difficult to separate the manifestations of a religious identity with the ethnic or national character and even resistance movements?

² There is a popular saying in Urdu that translates roughly as 'Sometimes one is required to look up to a donkey (arse) as one's father and get the job done'.

How does one begin to negotiate where cultural symbolism is also symbolism of the collective's memory of shared histories? The vocabulary of symbolism and its relationship to religion as in this case is complex and is culture and society specific. Therefore the clinical extraction of one from the other is impossible. It is hard to distinguish between sites of when culture is the agent, and religion the receptacle and vice versa as these are not fixed.

What the French law does, is it codifies cultural practices and assigns them fixed meanings and denies customs, the fluidity that is natural and inherent.

The critics of the French law argue that the ban specifically targets the Muslim community, is hastily drafted and contributing to highlighting divisions rather than to the making of a cohesive French identity.

The prospect of achieving a homogenous French identity based on the principles of French secularism in postcolonial multi ethnic and multi religious France is to deny France's past, and is like an attempt at white washing history.

The French pride themselves as they commemorate Bastille Day each year that serves to remind events of July 14, 1789, except now the very secular democracy model fails to safe guard the universal rights of freedom and expression of minority communities, e.g. the right to wear the kippa³, the Sikh turban and the headscarf by Muslim women. The question being, is there room for minorities in secular democracies? And if yes then what are the mechanisms that would have to be put in place to safeguard the interests of minorities in secular democracies? What are the possible strategies that the French government could apply to curb externally sponsored fanaticism that fosters intolerance?

³ In. Judaism. A skull cap worn by orthodox male Jews at all times and by others for prayer, esp. a crocheted one worn by those with a specifically religious Zionist affiliation.

Would it be more acceptable if individuals were taxed for wearing overt signs of religious affiliation?

Cigarette smokers pay a heavy tax for their pleasure and habit. Every smoker carries the potential risk of cancer: lung and mouth. Smokers who are also regarded as future patients are taxed in advance to pay for medical research and the possible treatment costs that would incur. All of this costs the state, as these expenses are ultimately passed on to the health sector, i.e. the government.

In a similar fashion all individuals who choose to govern their lives according to religion could be taxed in advance for the menace they would cause to the society in future. These taxes would be based on the assumption that religious people eventually become fanatics and then proceed to become terrorists. These individuals who are a danger to the western values of freedom and life style in due course have to be either detained or deported. All of which costs money.

Prior to the Spanish inquisition the Jews who lived under the Muslim rulers were granted full protection and religious freedom as long as they paid their community taxes in full.

In 1533 Henry VIII's marriage to Anne Boleyn precipitated the Act of Supremacy, making Henry the supreme head of the Church in England. In an effort to increase tax revenue Henry VIII levied a tax on all windows. A tax had to be paid on every single window in a house. Subsequently houses of the people became dark and damp as many windows were boarded up and new houses were built with the minimum windows.

The term daylight robbery was coined about the same time.

The veil worn by Muslim women is a sign of religious identity, and has come to be associated with ethnicity, cultural practice, women's seclusion, a form of resistance, politics and freedom as well as oppression and control by the patriarchal structures; both of the home and the state.

If we were to try and trace the origins of the practice of veiling, it would be difficult to pin the exact place and moment where it was first adopted. Instead if we were to limit the extent of our study and only look to the three Abrahamic religions it may be possible to contextualise the veiling practice by the Semitic and Arab people, that was later adopted by people who accepted the faith.

Most importantly, all three religions believe in the oneness of God and unity of creation. They hold common the belief that Adam was the first human created by God, followed by the creation of Chava or Eve for Adam's company. The beginnings of life on Earth are marked by Adam and Eve's expulsion from the heaven. This was also the first decree that concluded and assigned distinct gender characteristics. It is commonly believed that all three divine texts hold Eve responsible for leading Adam astray.

According to Judaism and Christianity it was Chava or Eve who enticed Adam to taste the fruit of the forbidden tree of knowledge, this which eventually led to the expulsion of Adam et al from the Heavens. According to the Quran it was Satan/serpent who enticed Adam and Eve to taste the forbidden fruit. Nevertheless Muslim scholars maintain that it was Eve who tasted the fruit first. All believe that Adam and Eve were sent to Earth to repent for their sin.

Thus only married Jewish women are required to cover their hair for the sake of modesty.⁴

This is an early instance of where a woman's hair is assigned to be her most pleasing and tantalising of attributes.

Every morning orthodox Jewish men say a men's prayer that begins with the note...

⁴ Eve was married to Adam; therefore this rule only applies to married women. An unmarried woman's sexuality is not perceived to be dangerous to the moral fabric of society i.e. above all it is the sanctity of marriage that has to be protected. The Zohar (volume III p. 126a) elaborates on the many blessings which Hashem showers upon the woman (and her entire family) who cover her hair properly

'I thank thee lord GOD the king of the heavens for making me man...'

Referring to the story as told in Genesis:

[...] And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof and did eat; and she gave also unto her husband with her, and he did eat.

And the eyes of them both opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves aprons... And the Lord God called unto the man and said unto him, 'Where are thou?' And he said, 'I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself...

Unto the woman God said, 'I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband and he shall rule over thee.'

Sura Nur in the Quran states:

[...]

And say to the believing women
That they should lower
Their gaze and guard
Their modesty; that they
Should not display their
Beauty and ornaments except
What (must ordinarily) appear
Thereof; that they should
Draw their veils over
Their bosoms and not display
Their beauty except

To their husbands, their fathers,
Their husbands' fathers, their sons,
Their husbands' sons,
Their brothers or their brothers' sons⁵

The generally accepted meaning of the line, '*what (must ordinarily) appear*' is understood in the light of the rules regarding women's behaviour and sexuality already set out by the former religions of Judaism and Christianity.⁶ Therefore most Muslim sects agree that Islam requires women to adopt a modest dress code and that, which would include covering the head. It is the second⁷ section of the same verse, which is interpreted by the more orthodox sects to endorse laws that enforce women's seclusion. Islamic laws as made compulsory by the Wahabi or orthodox Shia sects as practiced in Saudi Arabia or Iran and what was enforced by the Taliban regime in Afghanistan are examples of such.

All three religions bring into effect their views on women and sexuality from the deterministic position. Women are not allowed the same freedoms as men as they are considered weaker of the two sexes, the antecedent for which remains unchallenged by example of Eve.

⁵ A. Yusuf, Ali The Holy Quran, *Text translation and Commentary Sura XXXIV Nur*, or Light 31.

⁶ Early Islam was revealed to Prophet Mohammed as the final word on the brahmic faiths, the function of which was to unify the people of the 'book'. Muslims believe that God sent 124, 000 prophets to Earth for the benefit of human race and include Adam, Abraham, Noah, Moses, Joseph, Jesus and believe that Mohammed is the last and final prophet.

⁷ Or their sisters' sons,
Or their women, or the slaves
Whom their right hands
Possess, or male servants
Free of physical needs,
Or small children who
Have no sense of the shame
Of sex; and that they
Should not strike their feet
In order to draw attention
To their hidden ornaments.
And O ye Believers!
Turn ye all together
Towards God, that ye
May attain Bliss
ibid

The difference in the Muslim understanding of sexuality to that of the Judeo Christian convention as Fatima Mernissi puts it:

[...] The Muslim theory of sublimation is entirely different from the Western Christian tradition presented by Freudian psychoanalytic theory. Freud viewed civilization as a war against sexuality. Civilization is sexual energy "turned aside from its sexual goal and diverted towards other ends, no longer sexual and socially more valuable". The Muslim theory views civilization as the outcome of satisfied sexual energy. Work is resulted not of sexual frustration but of a contented and harmoniously lived sexuality.⁸

Therefore women are denied the possible free will to harness their "desire to please and tantalise". And so they are barred from holding any public office as it is expected that men are likely to succumb to the baser instincts in the presence of the fairer sex. Thus it is incumbent upon all Muslim women to avoid the possibility of sexual friction or tension from society and to ensure the smooth running of daily affairs of the world without distraction. 'Harmoniously lived sexuality' that which is stipulated by the marriage contract. Furthermore according to one tradition of Caliphate Ali, a woman is assigned nine parts of desire and man one.⁹

As a result the Torah, Bible and Quran grant men control over the women, which then gives men the unchallenged powers to control women's sexuality.

⁸ Sexuality and Gender ed. Christine L. Williams and Arlene Stein, Blackwell 2002
Mernissi, Fatima 'The Muslim Concept of Active Female Sexuality' Chapter 20 p302

⁹ Again as Fatima Mernissi states, '...the absence of active sexuality moulds the women into a masochistic passive being. It is therefore no surprise that in the actively sexual Muslim female aggressiveness is seen as turned outward. The nature of her aggression is precisely sexual. The Muslim woman is endowed with a fatal attraction which erodes the male's will to resist her and reduces him to a passive acquiescent role. He has no choice; he can only give in to her attraction, whence her identification with *fitna*, chaos, and with the anti-divine and anti-social forces of the universe.' Ibid p305

Henceforth the responsibility of upholding society's morals is borne by the women, as it then becomes man's responsibility to see that women ascribe to the role assigned to them by the divine. At this point a woman becomes the property of the entire society, the site that becomes to signify pride, honour and moral character that 'has' to be heavily guarded and protected.

Except as John Berger points out and says:

[...] They become aware of being naked because as a result of eating the apple, each saw other differently. Nakedness was created in the eye of the beholder.¹⁰

Is veiling more than just hiding nakedness? If we are to refer to a line from Sura Nur,

[...] And say to the believing women
That they should lower
Their gaze and guard
Their modesty...¹¹

The Muslim concept of modesty begins and ends with modesty of character i.e. actions and the gaze i.e. intention, as desire is constituted in the gaze. If it is intention that determines the value of any action, does the Hijab or the veil serve to neutralize a woman's physical attraction? Does it render a woman undesirable or unattractive? On all counts possibly not, as no matter what the woman does or does not do, she fails each time she draws attention upon herself. Therefore in extreme societies women are banished to the women's quarters.

My grandfather has told me stories of the days when he claimed he could recognise a beautiful woman by just looking at her feet. He remembers those days with fond memories, and thinks that modernity has reduced the romantic to the vulgar.

¹⁰ Berger, John Ways of Seeing British Broadcasting Corporation and Penguin Books Ltd. 1972 pp 48

¹¹ A. Yusuf, Ali The Holy Quran, Text translation and Commentary Sura XXXIV Nur, or Light 31



In Muslim societies where segregation is practiced, the absence of women can make their presence much more acute and increase the nuances of all that is flirtatious and attractive. Separation increases awareness of the other sex and what is constituted as sexual becomes much more delicate as does the sphere of what and what is desire. As a result sexuality in general is much more heightened. Particularly as celibacy is considered un-natural and Islam as a religion makes marriage almost obligatory on all men and women.

On the other hand it is not as if just because women are required to wear the headscarf they don't fall in love, they don't have desires, they are not free, they do not have professional careers and most importantly have no control over their own bodies.

Neither does it mean that they cannot fight their own battles regarding gender equality and agency. State sponsored laws in the name of secularism such as the French ban on headscarf do not in any way expedite women's emancipation.

The ban on the headscarf is a cosmetic measure at supporting women's liberation, and is aimed more at humiliation. It renders the question

of objectification of women's bodies obsolete and the controls once operated by religion come to be operated via the secular state.

The Muslim population of France is mostly comprised of people from former colonies, a large population of who are Algerians. In his essay 'Algeria Unveiled'¹² Fanon argues that colonial powers not only seek to control the wealth and land of the colonised people, but also seek to establish a cultural hegemony over the colonised. One way by which they establish their supremacy is by dominating cultural signs. Fanon's essay that was written in 1959 maps a certain kind of 'semiotic guerrilla war' pertaining to cultural practices of the coloniser and the colonised. Fanon who became the leader of the Algerian National Movement died in 1961 one year before Algeria gained its independence in 1962. Amongst the first hegemonic campaigns included the forceful westernising of the Algerian woman. This was effectively a 'ban' on the practice of veiling.

In order to have complete autonomy over Algeria, the French adopted a systematic program of cultural takeover. They perceived themselves as liberators of women. Liberation from the *Haïks*, liberation from the harems and liberation from their own culture that was 'oppressive' and backward. They imagined that if they were to win the women over, the rest of the country would be sure to follow, adopt French culture and establish France's superiority over Algeria.

Assiduously following the agenda of re-structuring the Algerian society, the veil continued to work in the imagination of the coloniser. It was the veil that hid a certain beauty; the inscrutability of beauty and the curiosity about the lives of these women led to the mystification of Algerian woman. With this began a process of exoticism and to use Edward Said's term, Orientalism in Algeria. This was not only restricted to government officials, it became a way of seeing the colonised woman. For example Eugene Delacroix's 'Algerian Women in Their Apartments, 1834' which hangs at the Louvre in Paris beautifully

¹² Ed, Duara, Prasenjit, Decolonisation, Perspectives from Now and then. Re-writing Histories, 2002 Chapter 5 Frantz Fanon 'Algeria Unveiled' 1959 pp42

caricatures the imagination of the coloniser. These women are imagined to be sensuous ladies of leisure, spend their lives lounging in plush surroundings. They smoke opium and are waited on by slaves who attended to their every whim.

The Algerian resistance movement used the colonizers fantasies against her. Whereby an element that was undifferentiated and homogenous in Algerian society, assumed the roles of deadliest of the guerrillas.

[...]

Carrying revolvers, grenades, hundreds of false identity cards or bombs, the unveiled Algerian woman moves like a fish in the Western Waters. The soldiers, the French patrols, smile to her as she passes, compliments on her looks are heard here and there, but no one suspects that her suitcases contain the automatic pistol which will presently mow down four or five members of one of the patrols.¹³

It was during this time when the veil was almost dropped, its taboo character for Algerian society, was reassumed when women's involvement to the movement came to be known. In the following round of offensive against the French, the veil served as camouflage. The *Haik*, which renders a body shapeless, was ideal for transporting weapons from one part of the country to the other.

The veil during this time continued to be used as a technique of resistance, both as a guerrilla strategy and as a symbol against European occupation. The roles assigned to the women in society became much more fluid, as did the character of the veil. Till the French decided to renew the offensive against the Algerian society and put on a show of liberating the women from behind the veils. On May 13 1959 many poor women that included prostitutes and servants were dragged from homes and brought to the square

where they were symbolically unveiled amidst cries of '*Vive l'Algerie francaise*'¹⁴

[...]

Before this new offensive, old reaction reappeared. Spontaneously and without being told, the Algerian woman who had long since dropped the veil once again donned the *Haik*, thus affirming that it was not true that women liberated themselves at the invitation of France and of General de Gaulle.¹⁵

The Algerian question to the veil is viewed as an attitude towards occupation; similarly the significant movements of our times have also reduced women's bodies to sites, not too dissimilar to battlegrounds. In changed times women's bodies not only remain culture bearers but in the times ahead come to represent change and even deliverance. Mustafa Kemal, Ataturk founder of the Turkish republic, in the 1920's abolished the scarf from all public institutions. Striving to push ahead to secularise the country the traditional headscarf worn by women was declared backward and even the Persian script obsolete. It was about the same time when the Turkish language adopted the Latin alphabet.

Following the Iranian revolution in 1979, Ayatollah Khomeini returned from exile to Iran and instituted the Islamic Republic. He not only hijacked a peoples revolution, but the hardest hit in the country were women, who during Shah's time were forced to modernise and dress like the European, under the Ayatollah they were stripped of all their fundamental rights and were forced to obey extreme orthodox Shia medieval Arab laws which included the severest of punishment for any woman who did not obey the law regarding veiling.

¹³ Ibid pp51

¹⁴ Ibid pp54

¹⁵ Ibid pp54

The French ban on the headscarf cannot be seen in isolation to the past. The French occupation of Algeria for example is not free of rape and pillage.

For the Algerian French Muslim the 2002 ban on the veil, evokes events of 1959.

Those who resist are not only resisting their fundamental rights of freedoms, but are also protesting against an attitude.

The veil here is a symbol of identity, shared history and a symbol against imperialism.

And symbol of the unequal partnership of the coloniser and the colonised.

War, Peace, Feminism and the Paradox of Freedom¹

Mangalika de Silva

They make slaughter and they call it peace – Tacitus

Batticaloa. June 2002. A middle aged Sinhala mother of two teenage sons, who runs a small boutique in the town, spoke to me in fluent Tamil expressing her anguish: 'Recruitment of young male children is high in this area now. I fear for my two sons. Tigers can anytime walk right into my bedroom and snatch my boys away. They will have one uncompromising demand: give us either one hundred thousand Rupees or your child! Do I have that kind of money? Can I ever give my children over and live peacefully? Where can I run? My own family disowned me for marrying a Tamil. I still have no choice but to flee with my two children'. Elsewhere, a group of women at the Punnaicholai Sri Maha Badra Kali Amman Temple speak of everyday indignities and the grotesque forms of exploitation in the form of kappam Tigers exact in periods of religious devotion and worship. Apart from TV screens showing propaganda films of Tiger militarism inside the sacred space, which were exempt from tax, every cup of tea, vadai and ice cream sold to visitors was levied. Temple priests were helpless. They said even Amman lives in fear; 'Goddess Kali has fled and no longer resides in the temple', quips a visibly anxious voice. Young girls are routinely abducted. Some are casually forced out from their mothers' embrace. Smuggled into the thick hostile, carceral forest, they are given military training under intense system of surveillance. Militarisation of young girls and boys is highest in the remotest and poorest of villages in the east. Similarly, instances of extortion, taxation, use of children in propaganda are routine, pervasive and grotesque in form.

¹ This piece was written in the months of May-September 2002 during my visits to Batticaloa, Mannar and Jaffna as part of the Peace Exchange organized by the Social Scientists' Association.

The single most concern for women in the east is freedom from fear. The right to organize, dissent, resist. The Tiger stranglehold is debilitating on the community. Only the air people breathe remains to be taxed, some say cynically. The entire civil administration is in the grip of totalitarianism, from medical establishments to universities, divisional secretariats to schools. Three months after the promulgation of the MOU, which heralded the Pongu Thamil, the great Tamil cultural renaissance and nationalist resurgence, a leaflet was floated around calling for younger and older Tamil women to distinguish their age by way of appropriate, distinct dress code. Both groups of women were urged to cover their bodies completely, daughters to wear shalwar khomeez, mothers to be attired in saree and flowers tucked around their hair. 'We have our unique culture, tradition and history', asserts a Pongu Thamil activist. Then why not Tamil men return to their authentic tradition, the vettri? Why is women's dress an issue, far more serious and critical than their right to education? Why is Tamil nation apprehensive about their sexuality? Why this desperate control over their bodies? Why this talibanisation of women's lives?

Ailing frail mother of Lakshmi lost her only son ten years ago. He was killed far away from home. They never saw his dead body. There was no body to mourn over. His death was not theirs. Somebody else claimed ownership over it. Both mother and daughter never knew what home was like since then. Because there never was home they could claim as theirs. Behind their makeshift hut used during the day as a resting place, is an encroaching police camp. Mother slept in a neighbors' house. Daughter slept in another. For ten years, every night they went in separate directions to just make it through the night and live the day. Why? Out of fear, out of terrible insecurity. Theirs is a daily battle against the evil of poverty, the overwhelming sense of despair, fear and vulnerability both physical and social, the very wretchedness of their life.

Muslim and Tamil women are concerned over STF bases in the east being strengthened with new measures. The landscape in Akkaraipattu is dotted with imposing, terror inducing STF manned checkpoints. They are a sight that chokes the onlooker emotionally. Imagine their petrifying, pervasive effect on the community who inhabits that space? Their life is inevitably, inextricably bound with the local military industrial complex.

Most of their military operations have been temporarily deactivated. But their inexorable presence in their lives is a cruel reminder of things that were, have been and are yet to come. Women are deeply skeptical and ambiguous about the Army. Their homes, schools, shops, community centers, hotels, market places and temples have been overturned and transformed into bunkers, bases and brigade headquarters. If the ceasefire breaks down, ordinary Tamil women argue, the military will lust after those who euphorically celebrated it. Either way, war against Tamils, precisely because they have been historically constituted as such, will continue albeit in structurally different ways. In Morakotanchenai, LTTE sealed off a house barring the occupants from entering it. They inscribed the Tiger emblem on the front door. Why inflict such humiliation? Only because the family dared to refuse to submit to the authority that forces them to knuckle under, they refused to give away their sons to the LTTE. The imperial, obnoxious One Child Policy of the LTTE has been challenged, more often than not by women, but not without dire consequences. On the way to LTTE ruled Kokkadicholai, a woman describes Kaththankudi as "little Dubai". The town embodies nothing of the commercial gusto of this major global corporate hub. Yet the epithet is informed by a certain politics, arising out of Tamil resentment for "Muslim economic prosperity". True, it is the biggest business center in the east. But the comparison with the Middle East metropole is seriously conceptually misplaced. We see the vicious effects of anti Muslim hatred spreading to Valachchenai reducing Muslim commercial interests to charcoal. The atmosphere seems perfectly fertile especially after 11th September to fuel anti Muslim hysteria in a ceaseless repertoire of "Osamisation" of eastern Muslims, Islamic jihad, Islamophobia and fundamentalism. One constantly reinvents the other, the enemy.

Mannar. July 2002. Displaced women speak of years of alienation, indifference. The younger women languish not being able to marry, their inability to meet the pressures of dowry, due to increasing bride price demanded of them irrespective of their social dislocation. Can dowry be combated or legislated under Eelam? Women were ambivalent. Displacement as an oppressive social condition for women is irrelevant to the logic of tradition and culture. Culture must be upheld at whatever cost. There is no systemic assault on the practice. Despite

decades of war with all its structures of violence, patriarchal institutions have survived and are resurfacing alarmingly. Many women see marriage still as a 'passport' to stability, security and the good life despite the collapse of community and social structures of family. Why this increasing salience of the institution of marriage? Why this affirmation? Given the brutalisation of the social, women seem to fervently "believe" marriage offers them a space to reclaim for themselves a sense of dignity. Their desires collude with the grim social reality. Higher the women's earnings, more dowry is demanded. Freedom from sexual violence, domestic abuse, rape, police/army brutality, torture, incarceration, jobs, education, stable incomes and security are critical concern for women in Mannar. 'Government in Colombo must provide us security. We are first citizens in this country. We need toilets, houses and wells'. Their list of the undelivered promises hidden in the ledger book was endless. Fair price for agricultural produce, an accessible market, credit facilities for a people living in resource rich regions like Mannar cannot be unfair demands. Their once domestic, private, intimate sphere is public today, ethnicised, politicized and militarized. The fences that marked the boundary between the domestic and the community no longer exist. They have been pounded to dust. Homes have given way to military camps, schools to barracks. Their once vegetable gardens lay overgrown. The only marks of human existence or footprints left in ravaged Muslim villages are Bougainvillea creepers on the way to Silawathurai. Older Tamil women spoke openly yet reservedly about inter marriage. Tamil-Sinhala alliances are encouraging signs of inter communal coexistence and sharing while Muslim-Tamil liaisons are to be actively opposed, fiercely resisted and socially condemned. 'When a Tamil marries a Muslim, she is converted into Islam. She loses her distinct Tamil identity', an older woman remarked. What happened to the Muslims in Mannar who like the Tamils nurtured community relations, ran their business, engaged in fishing and agriculture, mixed and mingled in schools, built up roads and bridges, socialized, attended weddings and respected each others' sacred space? It is the Tamil nation that authorized Muslims be driven from their homes, schools and the community. Tamil women are bitter about this ugly, venal, genocidal history of the struggle. A truckload of Muslim refugees was seen returning from Puttalam, heading towards Murunkan. Thirty anxious,

hopeless, weary faces. For ten overwhelming years, they have been on an endless, perilous, dangerous journey drifting into nowhere. Their first return to the "desert" land where once their homes stood, was a rude reminder of the uncertainty that lies ahead. Their world is in ruins. Erasure is all that greets them on their painful return "home". Huddled together and unable to move in a cramped and overloaded truck, women, children, pots, gunnysacks, clothes, bicycles, men, infants all look beleaguered and broken.

Jaffna August-September 2002. Returnees are filling up temple spaces, unable to move into their own homes. Some of their dwellings were charred beyond recognition. In others, shells still remain half buried, those which fell many months ago but did not explode. Homes have been turned into mine fields, bedrooms into bunkers. Residents in the city remind us of the acid bombs that once rained down on them, human excreta that were dropped on a shell shocked, bombed out community. Some had witnessed the instant burning of over 40 civilians in one neighborhood. Jaffna had been a "closed prison" for many years, said the women I lived with. My perception is that it still remains very much so. The Navy runs the islands of Jaffna. The Army controls the mainland. The Sri Lankan state's biggest military presence is in Jaffna, around 40,000 troops. It is a military administered city. Their authority has entrenched their spread and permanence. The Army's total domination, its firm grip, its obdurate hold of Jaffna ensures state sovereignty over the peninsula. The irony is however this. Every ten yards where a police or a military post is found, state sovereignty has been challenged and undermined. It is the macabre that is normal for people inhabiting this contested war zone. Beyond Omanthai, the macabre becomes so banal. The very banality of war is also the ordinary. The MOU speaks of 'the need to create conditions to bring about normalcy'. In New York, after September 11th, the focus has not been on "returning to normalcy". Rather, the emphasis is on new normalcy. Normalcy too has been a shifting signifier in the north and east. For those mothers of the former southern Mother's Front whose missing sons never returned to their families, life can never be the same again. Tamil mothers continue to wage war for justice, demanding the state return the sons it arbitrarily arrested.

Chavakachcheri looks like an empty shell. What happened to its entire people? One wonders, in utter disbelief. Remnants of a building here, fragments of a school there, piles and piles of debris in private, fenced compounds. War and its blind destructiveness is nowhere so blatantly and sharply marked as in the Peninsula. Hundreds, nay, thousands of houses, thousands of trees and agriculture land destroyed in acts of systematic and monstrous warfare. One family had returned to their devastated village, which now looks eerie, desolate and savage. Chavakachcheri had been destroyed in a lethally single military attack during the September 2000 operation to prevent the LTTE from making a final *thrust*, into Jaffna, to use a male metaphor. Air force had pounded Chavakachcheri into oblivion as the bereaved community fled out of mortal fear of being devoured by the deadly Pukaras, Kafirs and multi barrel rocket launchers. Family histories and social biographies lay in ruins. In the islands where the Navy writ runs large backed by the EPDP, teachers, principals and students face continuous harassment at the hands of Navy which effectively surrounds the schools even though they have vacated school buildings. Schools are not demilitarized zones. Rather, security imperatives demand that the military status quo remains unchanged. With the Navy pulling out of school premises, a new security system has been instituted just outside the boundary of the schools. Life in the islands for school children and their parents, who every second keep worrying about their personal safety, is as miserable as before, despite opaque MOU "guarantees".

In Manipai and Annakottai, young girls and older women in UNHRC run sheds wage a different kind of war; the struggle to survive under dire, harsh, inhuman conditions. Years of brutality have impoverished and destituted vast segments of the Tamil community in the Peninsula. It is not about Eelam or Sri Lanka. It is about dignity, freedom and a full life sans privation. Right to education, to return to what was once their homes, stable income, secure economic activity, peaceful environment and security of their livelihoods. Years of displacement have deprived them of hope, power and desire. Yet they have not stopped dreaming. Many dream of recovering and reclaiming their sense of selfhood and subjectivity.

Jaffna police conducts all its routine administrative affairs in the Sinhala language, a place exclusively of Tamil speaking people. In the discourse of Sinhala nationalist militarism, Jaffna had perished under Tamil nationalism and militarism. Sinhala nationalism via the ideological state apparatus, the military, came to its rescue, "liberated" the place for Tamils and rebuilt the ravaged city. Tamil nationalism hegemonised by the LTTE, contests this history. Jaffna lay in ruins due largely to the Sri Lankan state's aggressive war against Tamils.

Nallur festival is in full swing. The LTTE holds an exhibition of photographs at the religious site amidst several kiosks, ice cream parlors and food stalls. At the entrance to the exhibition tent, is a large cut out depicting the inviolable borders of Tamil Eelam. Mahavir music blares like thunder. Young Tamil boys usher guests in. Photo exhibits and thrilling military adventure series available on cds and videos, in the form of Mullaitivu attack, Pooneryn attack, Katunayake attack I & II and so on. They have become museamised mobile extravaganzas that register the LTTE's dominance in public culture and imagination. The pictures on display, mostly taken from the battlefield, covering a decade of conflict and war, capturing primarily moments of glory, victory, masculinist military pride and honor, are a rude reminder to the Tamil community, of the movements' monumental sacrifices made in the cause of Tamil freedom. It is part of a process of the production of history to establish ownership over the historical apparatus that assigns the LTTE, the role of the authoritative sole sacrificer and the sufferer and hence the primary legitimate bearer of the new Tamil nation. From key tags with Tiger emblems to luminous photographs of the Suriya Theivan (sun god) Tamil Eelam is commodified, exoticised and marketised.

Eelam territory, stretching from Puliyankulam near the Omanthai border, - the military LOC, the FDL defended with millions of Rupees, (funds that could have been invested in social development), also overseen by the ICRC, - to Muhamalai, the northern most zone of ethnic separation, much of the land is abandoned by people who once inhabited it. It is depopulated, deserted, dreary and dry. At Muruhandi, hundreds of devotees of Pullaiyar, travellers on the A9 road, stream to a roadside

shrine room with coconuts to pray for a safer journey. Sunderan, a young boy of fourteen helps raise money for needy children to study. The LTTE gunmen shot his father in his own house. He was too young to remember when. His mother engages in wage labor to just keep his three siblings fed. In Vauniya, the LTTE informs a group of visitors from the south, that none of their leaders need to contest any future election since they are divinely chosen! The Palai public library built in 1968 has been blown to smithereens. Near Kodikamam, a group of army men were busy removing tiles from a blasted house roof. The rafters are dismantled and carted away. At Muhamalai army checkpoint, every single vehicle that passes through the security ring gets a leaflet warning them of landmines. Kilinochchi, one of the biggest mine fields in the north runs mine awareness programs. It is a Kafkaesque irony that the army should display such sensitivity now when they, in rivalry with the LTTE, mined the fields, homes and roads, an unconscionable crime against humanity. Passing through Chavakachcheri, a young boy riding a bicycle is spotted wearing a colorful T-shirt. It reads, "The revenge" How apposite!

Certainly the barrels, checkpoints and roadblocks that once dotted the landscape in Colombo have disappeared. War has left this blissful, surreal city, which is merrily returning to a spectacular nightlife, the glory of Europe, made possible now under conditions of peace. War has moved north and eastward where it deforms, maims, destroys and perverts. It has produced a new order of knowledge and authority, reorganised structures and economies of desire. In overt and covert ways, war rages today without body counts yet against specific bodies that have been historically, socially and culturally inscribed as different. When one stands at the northern frontier on the A9 highway, the zone of division of geographies, histories and cultures, one sees a world of contradictory meanings, contrasting imaginaries and conflating realities. The disparity, inequality and asymmetry between these colluding yet interlocking worlds are apocryphal.

Given these windows into spaces/places of what troublesomely constitutes the north & east, what might we make of the idea of peace in

Sri Lanka? What might a feminist conceptualization of peace entail? Even the term feminist needs decoding and deconstruction in the Sri Lankan imaginary. Liberal peace, which is currently dominant in the public realm, does not address structural asymmetries in power relations. It leaves the question of military hegemony untouched. More precisely, it eludes the question of power, hegemonic or otherwise. Like the dominant humanist discourse, it promotes equality and human rights without assaulting the networks of centers of power that operate in the social field. Liberal feminist practice is not committed to any ideological struggle predicated on a radical emancipatory impulse to bring about fundamental democratic change, i.e. overhauling of structures of power. Is then a deconstructivist, postcolonialist feminist critique of the concept, meaning and practice of peace possible in the present historical conjuncture/disjuncture? It seems so though it requires more discursive courage (than is currently available) and political conviction that such a critique aims at engaging with a variety of dominant discourses from a multiplicity of sites of locations. Such a positioning rigorously attempts to explore the intersectionality of multiple crises that evoke the grotesque and the sublime simultaneously of the Sri Lankan ontology. Radical politics is still in the grip of a repressive state apparatus. Twenty years of conflict have accentuated issues of class, region, religion, gender, ideology and culture yielding in its wake new complexities, tensions and contradictions. Decentralisation has not meant, in our perverted political context, decentering. We have competing centers of power all sustaining the center. The subject cannot imagine outside the center. I am using the word center as a metaphor to exploit its polysemy in alluding to a plurality of sites of domination and power. The subject is constituted as always desiring a center or a multiplicity of centres. All political imaginaries, authoritarian epistemologies stem from the center, be it the hegemonic state, dominant ethnicities, oppressive genders or classes.

It is argued that peace is not merely the absence of war. But what does peace mean for communities in the north, east and south? Some argue that we are in a state of neither war nor peace. Others contend, war has ended but peace has not come. During the previous PA rule, a strategy of "war for peace" was set in motion with "Sudu

Nelum” movement presiding over it. Those who refused to shore up the defence fund to drum up military support for the war effort were labeled “enemies” of the Sinhala state. PTA was invoked to cover all areas of dissent. Women moving in the public domain had to be stripped in the interest of “national security”. Remember the strip search on Sriyalatha? Particular bodies were ethnicised and criminalized in particular ways. The desiring nation’s grip on women’s bodies was so destructive that their bodies had a lethal effect on the social. They became heavily militarized, highly mobile machines of death and destruction. Such were brief moments of peace.

The UNP led regime that signed a MOU in 2002 with the LTTE reiterated its commitment to peace but articulated a “threat” posed by human rights activists who exposed abuses by the LTTE. There is also a great deal of unsaid, unvoiced or silent opposition on the question of holding accountable members of the armed forces for past crimes like extra judicial executions and disappearances of Tamil youth. To be anecdotal, a young Tamil student in Jaffna was on his way to a bakery in 1996 (the year that inaugurated the Eelam war II) to collect his birthday cake and instead had been led to a military camp by the army and was never seen thereafter. Hundreds of Tamil women, mothers grieve, remembering their last days, waiting in anguish for their return home. Justice seems a far cry for Tamil mothers who have been wronged, profoundly injured.

As if enough ain’t bloody enough, the UNP kept exhorting the JVP and the Sinhala chauvinist groups not to derail the peace process. Within the discursive space of civil society, which has incidentally not been playing an active, critical, effective role, having been thus marginalized and excluded from it, the familiar refrain seems to be ‘we must not rock the peace boat’. For Human rights, we are benignly told, time is not ripe, democratization can come after the political settlement, pluralism will be given in five years, real gender liberation will take twenty years to materialize and so forth. Such is the state’s presumptuousness and paternalism. These are arguably implicit assumptions in the rationalization of the idea of a “non-threatening peace” fashioned in the interest of political realism. I am echoing the irony of one of my feminist activist friend’s who, when

presented with such absurd abstractions bereft of any historicisation and contextualisation, retorted with brutal frankness: ‘who is threatening whom? The Tamils were threatened by the racist, repressive, Sinhala state, which is why they took to arms, and the Sinhala state was in turn threatened by the Tamil armed secessionist movement of the LTTE, which led to decades of bloody war! And now the threat of de facto Eelam threatens both!’

It is hence necessary to problematise the category of “peace” as understood in popular and public discourses which at best equivocate in terms of politics or help to safeguard the interests of hegemony. CFA, it must be asserted at this point, merely seeks to observe military security and is exclusively concerned with maintaining the military status quo and balance of power between the state and the LTTE. It has no focus on lives, labors or livelihoods of real people. It is indifferent to human security, making particular groups like women particularly vulnerable. It hastens to protect LOCs, borders and territories, maintaining the separation between “cleared” and “uncleared”, Govt-controlled and Tiger controlled areas. The exoduses of people forced to flee from “operational” areas has been a spectacular result of a military strategy of flushing out “terrorists” that led to the disintegration of territoriality and dissolution of sovereignty. While war has disappeared from the south (virtual absence of barricades, barrels or bunkers) war zone moves northwards beginning at Omanthai and extending up to Jaffna along the A9 route. Here, though high intensity warfare has been temporarily suspended in favor of a majoritarian truce, mini wars are fought on a daily basis.

How does one challenge a hegemonic conception of “peace” that conjuncturally authorizes our ethico-political world? Or how does one in a politically engaged way advance towards its problematisation? Hence my contestation will address the very episteme of “peace” as articulated by peace advocates that lacks the kind of critical, philosophical reflection and theoretical rigor. It was only the other day, two foreigners who were monitoring the CFA accidentally rocked the unyieldy LTTE boat on the northwest sea in Iranaithivu and ended up getting abducted

and summarily assaulted. The abduction of the two monitors underlines the macabre nature of the everyday in the lives of Tamil civilians, non-combatants, unarmed women, men and children. The incident involving the confrontation between the LTTE and monitors received wide coverage and media hype given the fact that they were foreigners. The very banality of other events, more cruel, inhuman and violent affecting ordinary women, mothers, school girls, school boys, farmers, traders, teachers, fathers etc and those critical and resistant to the LTTE excites no special attention. In the east where fear is endemic, Tamils who welcomed the lifting of embargo, removal of checkpoints and travel restrictions are viewed with suspicion by the military.

Like many anthropological accounts of Africa, one tends to see N&E as a world/space/society/culture simply gone 'awry'. But such a simple view fails to capture the complexities and contradictions immanent in this militarized social field. Hence the usefulness of illustrating the incident in Iranaithivu, in a series or a chain of hidden, routine, minute daily occurrences and events that have been grossly and deliberately overlooked or concealed by a logic of "security" and the pursuit of a "pragmatic" peace, to underscore my point. Peace as a lived experience, as a living historical reality for ordinary Tamils, Muslims and Sinhalese inhabiting the largely devastated north & east is an extension of conditions of "chronic" war. Such conditions are ideologically presented as enabling conditions of possibility of peace. There is nuclear peace in the subcontinent. War is peace. Peace is war. As the ethnic war transforms and multiplies as it has in the form of taxation, extortion, conscription, abductions, harthals, use of children in war propaganda, which rose to Orwellian levels soon after the MOU, the dominant conception of peace seeks to render these obscenities as meaningful and inexorable. What are then the existing conditions of [im]possibility for peace (read as practices of freedom) in Sri Lanka? How might we understand the politics of peace, which I wish to gloss as power politics that refuses to engage with the logic of nationalism and militarism and their local effects as they transform the self, subject and the community?

Peace, for Adorno, is a state of distinction without domination. Can we conceive of a peace in terms of relationality? The self in a

relationship of non-domination with the other? I am not simply concerned with the State as an ideological apparatus but other multiple poles of power, Foucauldian networks of capillary power and quotidian relations of domination. Is domination a permanent ontological condition and resistance a permanent revolution in a Foucauldian moral universe? How does one resist hegemonic notions of/and claims to peace? What are the oppositional notions of possibilities of pluralizing political space to create multiple visions of peace? What might a plural peace entail? A plurality predicated on practices of liberty? What are then the problematics in conceptualizing 'peace' in Sri Lanka in the light of concrete historical realities and fluid, shifting and contingent politics on the ground? I pose these questions to a politics of peace currently occupying the Sri Lankan public imaginary as critical reflections towards more enabling conditions of possibility and to think through some of the challenges that lie obstinately ahead.

Three Poems

Jean Arasanayagam

AT KITULGALA

Myself,
a smooth river stone shaped by wind and
water, water and wind,
or perhaps a rough, jagged rock
sculptured by the elements
on which a dragonfly rests briefly,
a butterfly flits past,
or a bird never seen before, perches.

Water, different voices, ageless,
the only immortality I can ever know.

I go deep, deeper into the freshwater pool
Just as if I were exploring a bedrock psyche,
water touched by sun, wind, rain,
chill against warm flesh,
ferns have grown out of rock crevice,
leaves fallen somewhere,
I breathe in this peace,
my old image drowns,
the new one surfaces, cleansed, purged,
so catharsis takes place,
only the illusion that I was
floats over the edge of time,
is caught in the currents
surges downriver.
Water flowing through rifts and fissures
of rock,
the wind spells its syllables
forms poem about an untrapped
spirit. Freedom from dross. Liberation.

POEM FOR BENJAMIN MOLOISE

Poets die like ordinary people do,
Criminals and others, call them what you will,
Murderer, assassin, conspirator, perhaps poet too
Fits in.

Their bodies flap in air and loosely swing
But leave no bruise or wound the world discerns,
So quickly past, the snapping bone,
The strangled chords, lifted down, the noose
Slipped off, packed away,
Never to be exhumed.

What's left of flesh now that the eyes
Are dark which never wake to light, to dawn,
Whose silver pincer-beams are blind, torn off,
Grow blunt and dulled.

Resurrections are too far away,
Death is the taker and he takes all,
All of the mind and body,
Throttles pulse of words that throbbed
And burst into a crimson flood,
The vessels spill, then stifled,
Stilled, the race of blood.

Bludgeoned into pulp, the sheaf of tissue,
Cracked, the bone, hot with marrow
That with death, congeals into a livid grub,
Yet, on this wasted land,
The desert spells the metaphors,

The final poem in this sack of flesh
Hanged from the gallows creates
The body's stanzaic shape into a dirge,
Left for that gluttonous vulture, Death.

PRISONERS

Why does he wear manacles
And not I?

Hands clasped before him
Steel bracelets like ancient amulets
Fastened on the tight veins,

His face blank, already that of the subjugated,
Silent, unprotesting as he walks past us on
The jostling streets, barefoot the churned up
Dust wedged between his splayed out toes.

Khaki-clad officials walk on either side of
Him, leading him into that captive mansion
With its unbelievably medieval turrets,
His spirit besieged, his tongue silenced
Of any rebellious, any seditious utterance.

I watched them once, once long ago
From that hill-perch with sentries guarding
A house with open doors, prisoners in the public
Jail.

"Shut them, Shut those doors," I screamed
"You are safe here, don't worry," the sentries
answered
Guarding the doorway.
The guns were not pointed at me yet, they
Did not lower them.

The next day, I woke after a sleep filled
With fitful dreams, to see the prisoners running
Round the quadrangle in a circle
Revolving in a spinwheel movement.
Safety.

I too then was a prisoner
I was then all unaware of what crime
I had committed, climbing, moving, treading
Halls and passageways, tunnels, labyrinths,
Climbing stairway after stairway
An anonymous figure, one of Piranesi's
Prisoners in that monotonous never-ending
procession.

I watch, some years later this prisoner
On these common streets

His sight is barred
He peers through ageless time.

He slowly starves,
His food is prison bread,
His water never quenches an endless thirst.

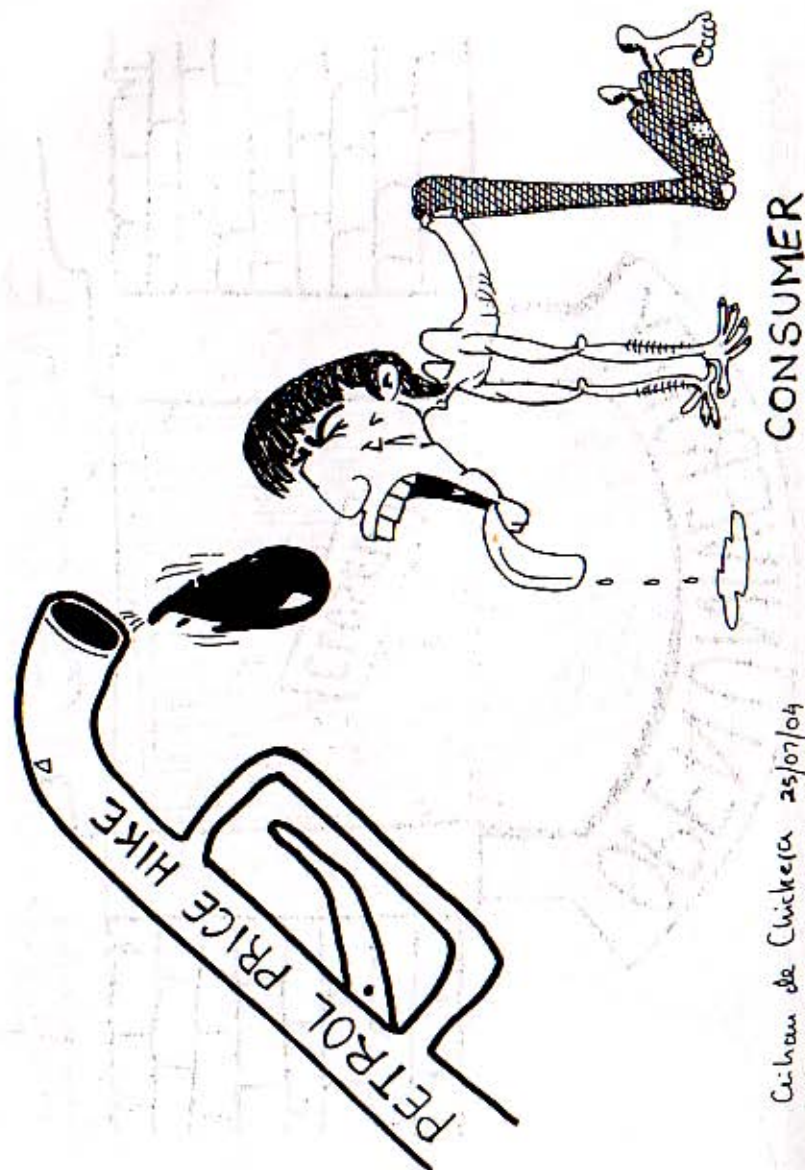
Looking up at the peerless sky
We both view a solitary bird.

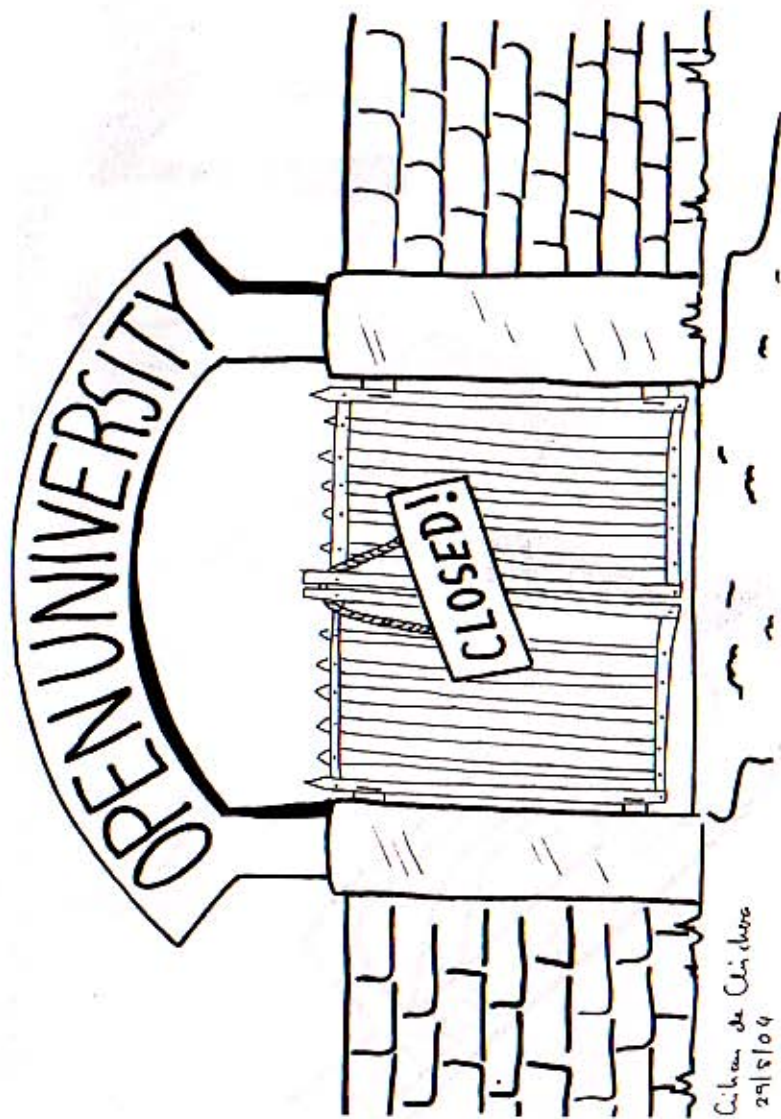
Unmanacled it flies
Where is its destination?

Cartoon World

Gehan de Chickera

We are flexible
- Thamilselvam





Calvin de Clindore
29/5/04

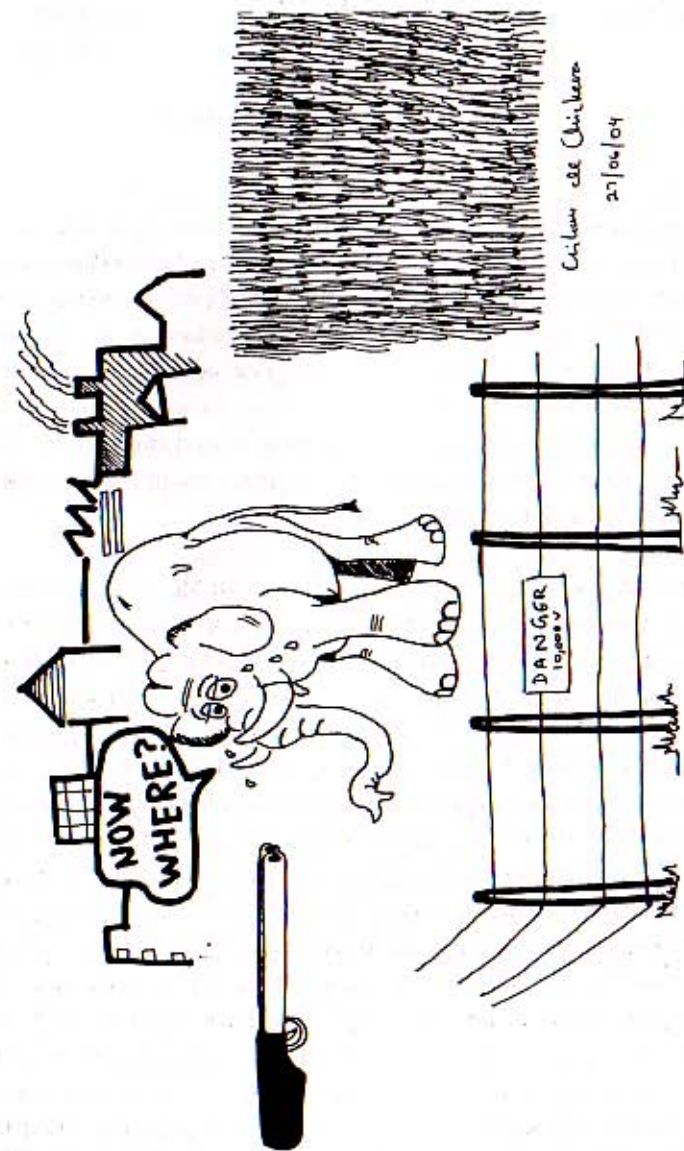
JVP TAKES ON IMF



Calvin de Clindore
12/7/04



SRI LANKAN ELEPHANT



Dirges

Mahangu Weerasinghe

The mid afternoon breeze found it's way through the tall trees, slapping her face and making her eyes close. Even in the darkness she could see them staring at her, waiting. Aruni opened her eyes again, and suddenly everything seemed brighter. Like technicolour in the seventies, every word, every stop she took, monographed in a studio. She walked forward, one foot in front of the other, gaze cast down, mind racing. She swallowed hard, as if swallowing would make them all go away. Her blouse flapped furiously in the wind, a small white accompaniment to the black flags that surrounded her.

She had reached it by now, all six feet of it. She ran her fingers over the delicate woodwork, tracing every dip, every curve. The pride of an undertaker. Looking in she saw the familiar face; whitened by everything they had filled him with. His eyes were closed, his lips drawn together, stitched. He had always hated the needle, and yet here he was now, stitches holding his very lips together. Maybe six, maybe twelve. She brushed her palm against the bottom of his chin. No stubble. She had always loved a day's growth of beard on him. But even that had been taken away from her. Tilting her head slightly, she saw her Uncle Herath, smoking a cigarette and laughing with his law firm colleagues. The old ladies were growing impatient, she could feel it. She wrapped her arms around herself, feeling the goose bumps form as the coldness of her fingers ran in to her shoulders. She threw her hair back, feeling the breeze run in rivulets up to her scalp, cooling her startled mind. She stared ahead at the Navy band - stark white, standing at attention. Gathered together to say good bye to their comrade, their brother-in-arms. Perhaps they were the only people standing still, she thought. Perhaps they were the only ones who knew what it meant to fight for what you believed in.

But she had fought. Keeping the home going working at her day job. Weekly visits to St. Theresa's. A candle every fortnight. For him. And yet he had been taken away. She wished she had gone back to school, maybe done her MA. Then none of this would have happened.

"Duwa... shall we start?"

Aruni turned around, facing her mother. She could see anxiety running in every fold of skin, every crease of old age. Behind her, her father stood awkwardly, staring at the ground. All her Aunts and Uncles were slowly gathering around.

"We can't keep the Commander waiting any longer."

And with that Aruni walked through the crowd and out of the crematorium gate. Everyone had quickly made way for her. Almost like she was a leper. Crazy woman. She could hear them behind her, contemplating the state of her mind. But soon she was well away, and all she could hear was the sound of her own feet meeting the tall grass. The weeds rubbed against her slim ankles, making them itch. She bent to scratch, grimacing as she rubbed the skin raw. Straightening up she saw Suren standing there, his usually playful face drawn tight with something she could not quite place.

"Akka, you have to get back there. What do you think you're doing?"

Aruni fought to open her mouth, to try and begin to explain. She wrestled with her thoughts, thrusting them aside as each overcame the other. Her ankle began to itch again, and she rubbed her sandal savagely against it.

"They're going to bury your husband in a few minutes..."

"He's not my husband.." interrupted Aruni, "he's just someone I once knew." Suren stood there for a moment, as if wondering what to make of his sister. Then without a word, he turned and slowly walked back the way he came. As he turned the corner, Aruni knew that he too would be condemning her. Calling her crazy.

It was a lot cooler where she stood now, and wrapping her arms around herself Aruni made her way towards the gate. She could always wait in the car. As the road came in sight however, the deafening sound of the Borella traffic also reached her ears. Rush hour. She turned around and walked slowly in the other direction. Passing a freshly buried grave, she noted that the candles on top had not yet stopped burning. Funny that two people should be taken away on the same day, at the same place. The path was narrower now, and shaded on both sides by overhanging *Nuga* trees. The dying sun was casting slivers of light through the cracks in the big branches, bathing the whole area in an unreal shade of white. Aruni sat on a gravestone. Felix Dissanayeke, 1901 – 1972. A loving husband and father. She kicked off her sandals and let her feet loll in the cool grass.

In the distance she could hear the guns starting to go off. *One. Two. Three.* She counted them slowly. Twenty-one guns to salute the very purpose of her existence. Twenty-one, and it would all be over. Everything. *Fifteen. Sixteen.* Aruni cupped her hands over her ears, refusing to listen. And then it was over. Silence. Her hands ran down her sides and on to the gravestone, feeling the cracks and blisters of the passing years. The smell of gunpowder came to her nose, and she inhaled deeply. It reminded her of Christmas, and New Year's Eve, of *Avurudu* and Election time.

Gazing up the path she could see them all walking down towards the gate. A blur of black and white making its way back to reality. Back to life. Aruni sighed, and for the first time noticed that her hands were quivering. She gripped the grave with the little strength she could summon, wishing she could melt into the sandstone. Her feet hurt, and she gingerly lifted each up, rubbing the sole with the palm of her hand. She could see her parents walking down the path now. Her mother looked like she was crying. She watched them till they disappeared over the hill. Then there was nothing to see.

In the fading light, Aruni started to notice the little things around her. She watched an ant as it clambered up the tombstone, walking right across the inscription and into a crack at the top. She listened to the wind run through the high branches above, searing the evening air with a flood of

noise. She sat there looking at the tall grass, and for the first time didn't know what to feel. It was Suren who came to get her.

"Akki... let's go..." he said quietly.

Aruni looked up at him, her dry eyes taking him in. No, he hadn't judged her. He didn't care what they thought. She got up and slowly stepped towards him. With each step the hard gravel dug in to her soles. If Suren had wondered where her sandals were, he kept this question to himself. She could feel the warmth of his hand envelope hers, scaring the coldness away. And as they walked out in to the night, neither said anything. Perhaps, there was nothing left to say.

Akka / Akki – Older Sister

Borella – Borough of Colombo, Sri Lanka – where the main general cemetery is situated.

Nuga – Large tree with gnarled bark and big branches.

Avurudu – The Sinhala New Year, celebrated in March/April every year.

Duwa – Daughter

The Letter

Rosemary Alles

Ghosts.

They inhabit the long corridor in my Grandmother's home. Snared in gilded frames, the sepulchral beings are suspended, frozen in time. These are the faces of my ancestors. The ethereal assemblage runs the length of teak paneled walls along the dusky walkway. Countless eyes drill my heart, pleading release.

Where there are no frames upon the walls are doors leading to bedrooms, gargantuan living rooms, luxuriant dining rooms, bathrooms, kitchens and servants' quarters. My Grandmother lives in opulence and with largesse. She is Catherine.

It is October in this land called the Teardrop. I am eight years old. The music of that age is flung across the years and tethers me forever to a memory.

One childhood day, the dead frown disapprovingly on my brother and me as we race madly, end to end through the dimly lit corridor. Arjuna and I are engaged in our favorite game. Great grandmother Rambai, capricious and supremely evil, occupant of the largest, most ornate frame, will devour the one coming in last. I always lose.

"You were lucky this time! Next time she'll eat you!" my brother pants.

Terrified yet disbelieving I avoid Rambai's hypnotic gaze; my hands clasp the handle of the great door at the corridor's farther end. The enormous brass handle is my anchor. "No she won't, she hates *you*! She'll eat *you*!" Sliding to the floor, we become silent. The scar of innocence labors between us, lured by the whisper of a wraith. Sweat glistens on Arjuna's

brow. The thunder of our footsteps has receded, as have the ghosts. My terror abates.

A thought creeps upon me. My breathing is ragged.

"Aiya, let's visit Sanath Mama?"

My brother's skinny face is transfigured. His beatific features turn dark, brooding.

"Amma said we shouldn't!"

"But Amma is away!" I venture in protest.

He hesitates.

A small victory for me, my brother's reluctance to disobey my Mother's wishes! He sees the glint in my eye. Hesitating again, he predictably succumbs.

"Alright, Amma is away, so I guess it's fine... yeah, it's fine... Come on! I'll go first!"

Of those immense doors leading to the cavernous interior of the great home, one opened to a colossal bedroom and bathroom. In this space lived Uncle Sanath, *Sanath Mama*. For the most part his massive cage contained him. At mealtime he emerged garbed exclusively in colonial regalia. Immaculate and restrained, his anger was relegated to some obscure region of his interior. Perhaps lying coiled and serpentine bordering his abdomen. His left hand clenched a copy of Dr. Walpola Rahula's **What the Buddha Taught**. He insisted on sitting next to my mother, where, between morsels of curry he made copious notes from the tattered book. When the gong rang for dinner, my father invariably mumbled to my mother, "Showtime! Let the animals out." She ignored him, ushering Sanath Mama to his preferred seat with a degree of grace and gentility she had long withheld from my Father. As of late she seemed bereft, gone.

My brother's words, "I'll go first," fills me with relief. Sanath Mama's restraint is notoriously provisional. We arm ourselves with a suitable talisman to parry his demon in the event it uncoils itself from within. Sanath's bedroom is adjacent to an enormous bookshelf. Unexpectedly, the necessary charm comes in the form of a book, Bram Stoker's **Dracula**.

Sanath had developed an irrational terror of the book's subject matter. The mere mention of the book caused him to shrink in ignominy mumbling incoherently to my Mother, requesting it be removed permanently from my grandmother's library. To my grandmother Catherine, Sanath's nervous mumbling grew increasingly unpalatable. The book stayed. It was filed under "S" for Stoker, lamenting between John Steinbeck and Irving Stone. Catherine assured its continued, unfettered existence on the bookshelf. It became a daily chore for my grandmother, accompanied by peculiar, acrimonious muttering.

Walking past the bookshelf my brother reaches for the book, his fingers curl tightly about it, rousing it from its slumber. We had our Excalibur. The cruelty of childhood is stained upon it. We edge toward Sanath Mama's room and knock lightly to no response. My brother knocks again calling out.

"Sanath Mama can we come in? Nangi and I *just* want to visit!"

Nothing. No scuffling, no angry muttering, nothing. My brother's subsequent loud banging is met with silence. He turns to me.

"Nangi, we should go no? He must be busy!"

An unknown force propels me. Before Arjuna's horrified gaze, I snatch the book from him and slide it beneath the locked door.

The uncanny shriek that emerges from within is deafening. The door is flung open. The book sails out into the corridor hitting me in my eye, blinding me. Sanath Mama stands in the doorway, naked. He is pale. Shaking, he screams.

"Y..y.. you h..h..hooligans! Kalakaniyas!!! I was d d dd doing my yoga..right in the middle of rhukasana! I'm going to th th th..thrash you buggers to death!"

My brother is tugging at my skirt. "Nangi, come on, run, run!" Stunned by the book hitting my head, I am momentarily paralyzed. Sanath is advancing. My brother picks up the much-reviled Bram Stoker and holds it before him, both arms extended. The cover with its gory depiction of the vampire, eyes madly blood shot, scarlet trickling from its fangs, faces Sanath. My brother is an exorcist, expelling demons from the damned. Sanath is impaled upon his doorway, stricken, halted. The air is acrid with sin. He staggers backwards into his room; a hand covers his member as urine trickles upon the floor. The door slams shut and bolts before us. It has ended.

"Ayooo! What is all this noise ah? I am trying to get my afternoon nap! What is going on? So much noise!! First *tada bada tada bada tada bada* along the corridor for more than half an hour and now something else! Not a wink of sleep! What are you rascals up to? You should be doing your homework no?"

The uproar has awoken my grandmother. She scurries from her quarters.

"You children you can never be left alone! Always in some kind of trouble. Soma! Soma!"

Me lamai dennawa elliyata aran yanna lamaya! Mage ninda nan than bodatama kedilla"

Catherine orders Soma the maid to chaperon us into the yard, complaining of her disrupted siesta. Pausing for breath, she snatches her book from my brother's hands. Marching to the bookshelf, she returns it meticulously to its home between **The Grapes of Wrath** and **Lust for Life**.

"Your mother is never around to watch you. She doesn't have to put up with your mischief... one thing after another. Ayooo! God have mercy. No discipline. How many times have I told you to leave that man alone

ah? How many times? He comes from the dark side of the family. He is ill, ill!" She taps her head. "Leave him alone!"

Leaning toward Sanath's door she raises her voice.

"Sanath, just take some of your pills. Don't mind these rascals. Marina will take care of giving them a good thrashing when she gets home. Of course, God knows when she'll be back! Both parents gallivanting the streets trying to save the world when the family is falling apart. Charity begins at home is what I say! Why does Marina have to work? Working for nothing! Where did she get the idea that her education was useful? Not from me! Never, ever home.. no wonder the children behave like kalakaniyas. Ah you two, go now! Go! Into the yard and play! And mind! Don't give Soma any kind of trouble.... oh, and for God's sake, leave the cows alone!"

The last comment was an allusion to Arjuna's failed attempt at riding my Grandmother's favorite cow, Seethamma on New Year's eve. A macabre spectacle in the thick of a series of fireworks set off by my Father. My Brother's leg remained in a cast for weeks and Sanath Mama, in a rare frenzy of imagination stenciled on it the Wheel of Samsara, counseling my brother all the while on the hope and despair of the 'human realm'. "Th... th.... only one that l...l.... leads to Nirvana men! ...but v.v.very difficult Arjuna.... ..b..b...because of so....so.... much maya... i i illusion... y.y....you... know what happened to that p...p....poor *miniha* Narcissus, no?"

My grandmother guides us toward the front door and porch. Soma follows in her wake, a look of resigned detachment on her homely face. Catherine leaves us, cautioning.

"Remember what I said. He is from the dark side of the family. You leave him alone, and by all the saints I hope you two have none of his blood. Kadawele! I pray for this every day!"

Sanath was my father Tilak's brother. Catherine my mother's mother. An urbane Tamil and Catholic by birth, she was prone to selective bouts of

religiosity. Proficient in the native tongues, Catherine randomly dispersed both Sinhalese and Tamil throughout her sentences. My father's family came to be the 'dark side' as she struggled to endure Sanath. It was unfathomable that her only daughter had married into darkness. In the third grade, Mrs. Thambipillai, my science teacher, had taught me about the dark side of the moon.

"You know Araliya," she said. "It's not that the moon really has a dark side child. It's that we creatures of the earth never get to see that particular side.... that's all... So, we like to think that the side we don't see is dark. Do you understand?"

Was Sanath Mama the dark side of the moon?

If Sanath Mama was the dark side of the moon, then Thatha, my father, must be the other side, the lantern of the night. Rising to fullness on Poya day from beneath the flank of the golden sun, he held the earth in his luminous embrace. I was prone to ask him:

"Thatha, why is Sanath Mama always hiding?"

"He is not hiding putha. He is tired. His feet are sore. You must try to have compassion for him my kella." A sigh. "Now, no more questions....massage my feet for ten cents?"

Compassion, the lonesome side of love. My father's family was Buddhist.

As evening comes, my grandmother prepares for the arrival of my parents. She orders Sinne Aiyar, her manservant, to flame the gas powered geysers for our evening baths. The bathrooms in my grandmother's home are equipped with hot water tanks. The water is heated rapidly by *geysers*, a colonial legacy. The tanks are attached to the main plumbing by way of a complex gyration of pipes, clamps, nuts, bolts and screws. The incestuous labyrinth of copper, silver, chrome

and brass dangles above the bathtub of each bathroom. Prehistoric octopi, fighting extinction. The sun strains for the earth as I lie beneath a great beast, woolgathering in my bath. I steal cautious glances at the ancient creature, fearing a weary tentacle detaching itself from the whole, entwining me in a fatal embrace.

The ancient pipes groan and mutter, their slumber arrested as the water within rises in temperature. I drift into reverie. Over the lap and splash of water on the walls of my bathtub, I hear Arjuna's voice through the open window of my bathroom. Scattering a sea of liquid about me I scamper to the windowsill and lean out on tiptoe. My damp skin, naked to the evening air, protests the unwelcome chill.

Arjuna's head dangles from his bedroom window. He is calling to Sanath Mama who stands by the bushes of jasmine. Sanath is bathed. His damp hair drips water on the collar of his starched white shirt. He wears his old batik sarong with elephants parading the border. Each trunk entwines a tail. Sanath has yet to ready himself for dinner. In a thatched wicker cradle, he is gathering jasmine for his evening offering. A small shrine, home to a delicate stone figurine of the sitting Buddha, lies at the base of the giant Mango tree, behind the bushes of perfumed jasmine and next to Arjuna's bedroom. The shrine was built by Sanath.

Arjuna is contrite.

"Sanath Mama... very sorry about the Dracula.book ok?... ok? very sorry...ok?"

"Ju...ss...tt leave me alone you buggers... leave me alone. And Buddu Ammo please do... do.. don't say that *ter..rrrible...terriib..ble* nama! ...please.....I have to chant *e...e.extra* t.. tt...t...oday b.b..b.ecause of you kalakaniyas! Karadere!"

Hugging myself against the cold I call out to Sanath.

"Sanath Mama, *please please* tell us about the *electron* things again, please!"

¹ Name

Arjuna whips his head around to face me.

"Nangi! You are going to get a good scolding from Arrchie again.... for talking to us without any clothes on!"

"Aiya, just shut up men! Sanath Mama is going to tell us about the electron things and you can't see my *chu patte*² *anyway*."

Sanath looks mollified. He loves talking about *his* electrons. They capture him entirely.

Sanath learned of electrons from the book my father gifted him on his birthday, **The Universe Inside** by Professor H.R. Somapala. When Sanath first experienced the vast and empty world of atoms whose proton laden hearts lay a billion lonesome miles from their electrons, he had pointed excitedly at the faithful array of geysers in my grandmothers home informing her that the water could be heated instead by electrons.

I love hearing him talk of the enigmatic particles. "Sanath Mama *please please please...*"

"O ooo...ok ok men....ok" Sanath balances his basket on a forked branch of the scented tree. Arranging his sarong, he readies himself for delivery. Clearing his throat, he begins:

"Th...th...they live at the e...e.edge of a .rr....really rr..really rr...really small thing called an at..at..atom. Y y *yyy you* are made up of atoms A A Araliya and y...y...you... A..A..Arjuna and even *me* men!... Th th that's why your A...A..Arrchie doesn't know w...w...what she's t...t...talking about when sh..sh....she says I am from th..th...the d..d..dark side! We are *all* made of the s..s...same thing see? S s..so if *I'm* from the d..d...dark side men - then so is sh sh sh she!. That's the b..b.beauty of it. Ega..ega..ega..egalitarianism....Do you know the m..m..meaning of that w..w..word A..A..Arjuna? No? I didn't th..th..think so. A g..g..good

² Genitals

word men... So, a...a...a...anyway, these e...e...electron things, when they are set f.r.fr...free from the a...a...atom thing, they can do *puduma* stuff, like make c...c...current!. Th...th...then the c...c...current can make l...l...light and h...h...hot water”

“Yes, yes I know... I learned all about it!” Arjuna is becoming impatient.

“Won’t the atoms miss the electrons?” I ask.

My brother is annoyed.

“Don’t be a donkey men! Of course not! Atoms don’t have feelings!”

“But, I have feelings! Sanath Mama does too! And he said we were *all* made up of atoms”

Arjuna is full of disdain. “You are a *puduma wathayak* men, that’s dumb! Just buzz off and finish your bath before you get a *pakka* scolding!”

Sanath Mama is perturbed at the distracting comments. He struggles to continue when I hear loud thumping on the bathroom door. “Araliya! Araliya! What is taking you so long girl?” My grandmother enters the bathroom, losing her footing on the slippery floor she gasps. “Goodness gracious... *swamine!* lord, God!” Grasping onto the sink for balance, she fixes me with a stare. “What a mess! What is going on?” Through the open window she sees Sanath. “You really must stop talking to the men without being properly dressed Araliya. I’ve talked to you about this before haven’t I? It’s *really* not *proper* child!” She bundles me hurriedly in a towel and calls out to Sanath as Arjuna’s head disappears rapidly from view.

“Sanath, *please* don’t encourage the girl! It’s really not proper at all! *Not at all!*”

Hastily, Sanath retrieves his cradle of jasmine and retreats toward the Mango tree. A waft of fragrance from his basket slips in through the

window before my grandmother slams it shut. I breathe it in petal by petal as my skin bruises against Catherine’s toweling.

“Arrchie aw...aw....aw! We were *only* talking about electrons.. Arrchie! Aaaw!”

Catherine is breathless from her efforts. “Don’t worry my dear, electrons will rule the world....it’s a *fait accompli!*”

“A *fat accomplice* Arrchie?... I’m talking about electrons you know....not that detective guy Parrot!!!”

“It’s *Poirot* Araliya.. *Poirot* you really *must* learn to pronounce properly! Why is it so hard for you when Arjuna picks it up so easily? And *please do not* make that hideous face when I correct you! Now *please* get ready for dinner.” She sighs. “I *still* have to take Astor for a walk and *then* have my bath.”

As day succumbs to night, Catherine takes her walk with Astor, the dog. On her return she ambles toward the kitchen. There, she instructs the cook on the evening meal. Soma is busy readying my grandmother’s bath. She adds a drop of scented oil into Catherine’s bath water. A stick of incense is lit and placed by the bathtub. A thread of fragrance mingles with the steam, sculpting an ancient song. Catherine takes time with her bath. After, she dons a Kashmir sari of slate grey shot in fiery streaks of orange. Her Thali³ is vivid against her neck. A golden cobra in reluctant submission on parched dark earth. Groomed and spruced for battle, my grandmother’s hair is coiled tightly upon her head. The languid breezes of my Lanka have long abandoned teasing wisps away from it. Catherine is a startling woman.

Later we gather, my grandmother, my brother and I, on the front porch awaiting my parents. Sanath Mama is cloistered in his room, out of sight. We sit around the porch table. My grandmother is ready for evening tea. She calls out to Sinne Aiyar the manservant.

³ Heavy gold matrimonial chain

"Cup o tea my good fellow Jeeves, please..." my brother flutters upon Sinne Aiyar's arrival, assuming a highly exaggerated British accent. Sinne Aiyar remains indifferent, immobile. Catherine sighs.

"Arjuna *please*, don't be silly. Sinna Aiyar tea *konduwango*, bring the tea please."

As Sinne Aiyar disappears into the house the great mountain in the distance darkens to purple and the cicadas begin their song.

Marina, my mother is home before my father that evening. My Grandmother wastes no time.

"Marina! I need to talk to you about your children!"

My Mother sighs. Her beautiful face is weary. She lifts the pins from the bun upon her head. Dark cascades tumble along her back. The fire torch glows at the far end of porch, catching the shining waves, deftly burying rubies and gold within the raven sea. A flame is let loose on her cheeks. The shimmer hides her eyes. My mother's hair is her armor before Catherine. She is barely audible.

"Mummy, let me get myself a cup of tea first, please. Then walk with me to the well and you can tell me about Arjuna and Araliya while I'm having my bath, no?"

"Marina! I *must* talk to you while you have your tea... I have already had my bath. I'm ready for dinner and I'm *not* walking to that well!"

My mother preferred the well at the far corner of my Grandmother's estate to the scalding comfort of the geysers. Mostly, the servants used the well. It was a long walk, almost a half mile.

On the rare occasion when she was home about sunset my Mother held out her hand to me and we walked to the well for our evening baths. My

hand clenched hers, a lifeline. Amma wore a sarong about her breasts; her hair reached her knees, the music of her body sculptured in liquid contours. When at the well she drew water from its dizzying depths, one bucket after another. Laboring she heaved against the pulley urging the bucket closer. Her breath quickened. As the rope with its captive approached her feet she grasped the bucket in her hands. I clung to her waist. A second passed and her arms lifted. The bucket was above. My body tensed. Then a tilt of her wrists and water thrashed about us. I gasped. It shocked, that cold. In the gloaming, the last rays of fire tore the pliable curtain, cloaking us in flecks of gold. At times in the distance a Koha would call yearning for something, "cuckoo.. cuckoo.. cuckoo....." The rope was lowered again. The bucket began its mad descent once more, swaying to and fro in denial.

Catherine will not walk to the well. She waits impatiently for a response from my Mother.

"Alright Mummy, let me get my tea..." A whisper.

In the crepuscular light, my Mother appears translucent, her glance toward me ephemeral. She lightly touches my brother's head in passing. I seize the sash of her sari. Peacock feathers gracing the border lie trapped in the palm of my hand. Her steps falter. Her shrouded face turns toward mine as she tugs her sari pota⁴ away from my grasp. The feathers are free. A night owl screeches.

"Araliya please... not now"

At night, tension sits with us at dinner. It scurries back and forth between the passing of dishes and darts among our contrived politeness. "Please-s" and "Thank-you-s" knife the thickness, landing sharply on my lap. I wince, watching my brother's sheepish face. Hesitantly, he raises his fingers to his mouth licking them clean of curry. Upon my father's insistence, Arjuna and I use our fingers during meals. It is the traditional way.

⁴ Sash

Thatha detested the colonial patrimony of cutlery. "Use your fingers," he would warn, noticing a well-laid table. Fingers. A practice shuddered upon by my grandmother who would glare balefully at my brother and I as we slowly and deliberately slurped gravy off our hands.

Sanath Mama sits to the right of my mother that evening. He writes feverishly. His left hand flies back and forth across his note pad as he cowers closer to my mother at the hint of every look, sound and swallow. Spasmodically, he twists his body in an impossible conflation of geometric forms. He glances furtively at my father, expressions upon him that trapeze the Rubicon of love and shame.

Silence prevails. Much later, well into our evening meal my Father clears his throat.

"Your grandmother tells me that you children did not behave well today. You harassed Sanath Mama and scared him with that miserable book which.... which...."

"Tilak!...." My mother's tone is sharp.

"... which ... never mind. I've said this before, and I'll say it again. Leave your uncle alone until *he* is ready to visit with you. If you continue this *pissu*.... mad behavior I'll arrange for Navaloka Sadhu to be here when you are finished with school. He can help you study the Tripitaka until your mother and I get home from work"

This is new. The threat of Navaloka. The priest at the local Buddhists Monastery. My brother looks horrified. The Tripitaka is epic. It is an enormous canon written in Pali. The story of an ancient psychology, a philosophy 2500 years old. The Tripitaka is the teaching of a prince, of Siddhartha Gautama, who abdicated a kingdom for truth. Is my father *crazy*?

"Well?"

My brother is loud, emphatic.

"Thatha..aa no no no *pleeses!* We won't do it anymore. Sorry Sanath Mama, *sorry! sorry! sorry!* We just wanted to visit. Nangi, we won't do it anymore, right Nangi? Ple..a.....se! Thatha? Amma?"

I nod vigorously, choking support.

There is more discussion; my grandmother clucks her tongue, interjecting tangential comments, randomly furthering her case against my Mother's every opinion and decision. Her barbs are generally hurled in my Father's direction. My father, the full moon. He ignores the venom, looking toward my brother and me he prompts.

Arjuna? Araliya?

We glance at each other, vehemently promising eternal good behavior. We are spared the Tripitaka.

Later that night, I am lying in bed. My bedroom abuts the front verandah and porch. The bedroom window is ajar. I have formed the habit leaving it open to look for the moon. I follow its dance from silvered sliver to gibbous gold. I am joyous on full moon and anxious at its waning. The new moon is a transfiguration I cannot abide. The lantern is cloaked, the dark hunter amok and I am filled with dread. The new moon is cause to long for my mother's arms. For her smell. For the silk of her hair against my skin. Tonight the tropical sky is bejeweled. The spiral arm carrying my Earth tears the night. Farther to the west is a storm cloud and eclipsed beneath it, gleaming its fringes is the moon. I am relieved. The wind picks up, slipping fragmented voices upon my bed.

My parents are buttoning the night, sipping tea on the front porch. I hear the uneven creak of the porch swing swaying beneath their weight. Through the scent of night jasmine, my father's voice is jarred, distressed. He is greatly troubled by the myriad irrigation projects in southern India.

"The Karnataka dam will destroy the *splendid* valley forests! Flooding them and devastating thousands of hectares of bird habitat! It may even displace villages men! How can this project be given serious consideration by the Indian government?"

She sighs. "It's heartbreaking... what a terrible shame."
A gush of wind and I shudder.

"Sanath is getting worse," my mother comments.

"Yes."

"Something must be done."

My Father is curt, determined. "Marina, you *know* how I feel about that remark. He is not going to a home! He is my *only* brother. I promised Amma I would take care of him no matter what! If only you would agree to *get away* from this place, we could build a home together *away from Mummy*, the situation will get better. I *promise* dear."

"Please, don't start that! Don't be absurd! We've been through this before. How will moving away make things better for Sanath? Who will take care of the children when both of us are at work? We can't afford servants. Already, Arjuna and Araliya are out of control. Imagine what it'll be like? Sanath might end up hurting them."

Thatha is angered.

"Sanath is not a violent man! He would never hurt the little ones. Yes, yes he can be explosive but never *ever* violent!"

"How can you be sure?"

"Because he is my brother men, my *blood*! I know him like, like I know....like I know. the rain! for heaven's sake girl, I know this! We played butta⁵ together...."

"I am worried for my children..." my mother says. "Worried for them. What happened with Geetha was *awful*!"

⁵ Hopscotch

"That wasn't Sanath's fault entirely. Geetha should have had more *common sense*!"

My mother raises her voice.

"*You* expect a little girl of *ten* to have *common sense*?"

Geetha was my cousin. Angelic Geetha. Endowed with attributes of little girls in fairy tales, Geetha was pampered and loved by all. I was an exception. I could not abide her. Surprisingly, neither could Sanath.

Geetha irritated me. She did not like mud, or cows, or running, or climbing trees. She liked dolls. She spent her days combing their hair, dressing them, bathing them, putting them to sleep. She also crooned to them. It was the crooning that irked Sanath. Geetha carried her dolls with her everywhere. At dinner the dolls sat beside her plate, on her lap, by her feet, on the floor. All open flat space became fair game for dolls. The crooning took on soporific proportions during mealtime. Sanath mumbled to my Mother. "*Pissu, pissu...kata vahanda kiyanda. Meke nidaganda welawak ae? Minissu kanawane...* Mad crazy girl, ask her to shut up... this is no time for a lullaby ... people are eating no?"

Geetha was to spend two weeks with us. An encounter with Sanath Mama's pills extended her stay to an unfortunate three. Sanath had to be reminded daily to take his pills. Two at each meal. The notorious pills were in a large glass jar in his room. He was forbidden to carry the jar outside his room lest he forget them somewhere within the immense house. Generally, he remained conscientious about his jar. It was labeled with colorful art and scribbling on Siddhartha Gautama, which were, for the most part, illegible. The **four noble truths** featured prominently. The pills remained secure in Sanath's room until Geetha's visit.

Geetha's crooning seemed to worsen over the course of her stay. Its worsening was proportional to Sanath Mama's accompanied distress.

He became forgetful. First, he forgot his tie, then his coat. Toward the latter part of the week, he arrived at dinner in a sarong and shirt, his hair disheveled. A turn of events causing my brother and father a degree of guilt-ridden amusement. Arjuna and Thatha established an ongoing wager to determine which item of clothing would be forgotten or supplanted at each subsequent meal. They indulged in animated discussions about the matter. My Mother smiled.

The old beautiful smile which somersaults my heart. Rivers of them run through me.

A day before Geetha's departure she did not respond when called by Soma for an afternoon snack. "*Loku nona, Geetha babiwe hamethanema hoyanawa, hoyanawa kobewath nehene!* ...Madam, I've been looking for Miss Geetha everywhere, *everywhere*, but can't find her no!" My grandmother joined the search. Several minutes later Geetha was found spread-eagled beneath the winsome old bottlebrush tree at the edge of the lawn. A form of rigor assailed her limbs. Her eyes were wide open, arms clutching her dolls. The leaves on the gnarled branches whispered to and fro hiding the face of the brilliant sun. Dappled sunlight skipped along her skin. Geetha was a patchwork of bronze and gold. A burnished rag doll.

There was yelling, ordering and organizing on the part of my grandmother. Catherine was in her element during a crisis. Geetha was rushed to the emergency ward of the Mahaiyawa private hospital, accompanied by my grandmother. A second car was to pick up Amma at the Peradeniya women's shelter where she volunteered her time on Saturdays. My brother Arjuna and I were instructed to stay home with Sanath.

Catherine left Soma with a telephone number at which she could be reached at the hospital. Arjuna was to call my grandmother if the need arose. "*Soma, Arjuna babite me number eke dila matte katha karande kiyande uwamanawake awoth*"

Soma looked harassed. "*Hodai Loku Nona... yes Madam*"

The convoy attending Geetha and Catherine left our home for the hospital. Arjuna's face was aglow with triumph. "Nangi, I will be calling the hospital see? She wanted *me* to call!

I stuck my tongue at him. "I don't *care* men!"

Sanath Mama had been a silent and tense onlooker during the chaos of the past hour. He skulked back into his room looking perplexed and gloomy. The colorful batik sarong draped about his ankles, white shirt tucked firmly into the belt at his waist.

The sun danced across the sky. The hours passed.

Arjuna and I were playing batta on the sand patch by the Kohomba tree when we heard raised and excited voices inside the house. Sanath came running into the yard, naked this time. He was yelling "A A A rjuna! Arjuna! Araliya!.. I... I.. I know what hap...hap...happened men! I know what happened!"

Soma followed in Sanath's wake. "Sanath Mahathaya, Aiyooo..Mahathaya.. *Mona pissuwakde meke ah?* Sanath sir...Aiyoo please...sir..what madness is this ah?" She jerked her head around wildly, as though hoping to whisk away anyone who may be witnessing the spectacle of Sanath's nudity. As ever, I became fascinated by Sanath's penis.

"Aiya See... Aiya... I told you no? His thing has a lot more *ralli*⁶ than yours! I *told* you!

"Shut up you idiot! Donkey!" My brother was furious. He wanted no one to know we compared genitalia. Albeit, he could not help interjecting, "That's because it's *old* men! That's why it has a lot more *ralli* than mine"

"It's *really* ugly!"

⁶ Folds

"I say I.. kn know what hap hap happened men!" Sanath had covered himself with one large hand and was gesturing madly with the other.

"*Baby missie ess wabande ess wabande Aiyooo Budu Ammo!* Missey, close your eyes, close your eyes.. Aiyoooo... in the name of the Buddha close your eyes!" Soma was appalled. She moved behind me, gripping me by one hand and covering my eyes with the other. Her palm was rough, fierce. It smelled of stale curry. My eyes stung under the pressure, angering me. I turned my head and bit her forearm viciously. She screamed, letting me go. I tasted blood in my mouth.

Sanath was struggling to convey his discovery.

"I say .I.. kn know what happened men.... I know ...what..."

"Aiyooo.....ok, ok, ok, so what happened?" My brother voice was surprisingly firm.

"Geetha a..a...ate my p..p..p...pills men! That's what happened!!!. The bl...bl...bl...bloody girl a..a...ate my pills!!"

The four of us stood before the vast entrance to my grandmother's home. The sun dipped behind the mountain, tracing its edges in a blaze of orange. A sudden chill made me shiver. Soma had tears in her eyes, stung from my bite. She looked at me, shocked, hurt. I was contrite but the words were dammed in my throat. Shuffling in confusion I hardly registered Sanath's revelation. Arjuna started running toward the house, demanding the number Catherine had given Soma.

"*Soma matte Arrchie deepu number eke dende!*"

The hospital was called. The proper antidote was administered and the matter of Geetha's mysterious illness, laid to rest. Sanath Mama had left his pills by the rock wall on the path to the well. Geetha had found them.

That was months ago

Geetha has not visited since. Tonight, there is contention on the front porch.

"*You* expect a little girl of *ten* to have *common sense*?" My Mother's voice is raised, chagrined.

My father becomes impatient, "Look, that girl Geetha is on another planet men!...dreaming away her time. Always popping anything that comes across her path into her mouth... what can I say... it was an accident. Arjuna and Araliya have never eaten his pills have they?"

"Aiyo never mind. As usual you are missing the point Tilak. I'm tired. I'm going to bed."

"*Please* let's talk this over, please? Let's settle it. Every time we disagree you turn away! We need to talk! *Don't you see? Please!*"

"I can't... I'm *really* tired, really. I can't." My mother's voice is defeated, beaten. I hear the swing creak and her footsteps lead toward the house. There comes a silence. I lean through the window and catch a glimpse of my father, his head sunk deep upon his chest. In the sky above, the moon still lies submerged by cumulonimbus. The wind gathers strength. A sudden gust and the milky way disappears into mystery. Silver streaks the sky. Distant thunder rumbles closer. In a great crash the rain arrives. In the dim light of the fire torch, my father's head is a crown of moisture. The obsidian thickness is suddenly speckled, each speck of dew a jewel. His shirt is splattered by rain; it clings to his chest. Slowly, he rises wiping his face with the corner of his sarong. The swing creaks. For an eternity, he stares into darkness, into the river between earth and sky. Tucking his sarong back in a knot he disappears into the house.

My window starts to rattle.

I am frightened, suddenly, of nothing. Where is Amma? Should I go to her? Maybe I should call Soma? But I can't. I have yet to say "sorry

Soma, sorry ane” for biting her. Dry sobs hack my throat. My fear turns to terror. I *must* close the window. Leaving my bed, I pad toward it; I lean through the opening and into the rain, reaching for the latch. My arm is soaked in seconds. *Then*, I see him. Sanath Mama sits crouched by the steps leading out from the porch, hidden in the shadows of the Kohomba tree. He has no shirt and wears only a sarong. He holds his head in the cradle of his arms, the broken head of a doll. In that fraction of time that I am stunned he lifts his head and sees me. Uncoiling, he rises, from earth to air. Water streaks his lean torso, forming a confluence at the knot of his sarong. It seeks the earth, urgent along riparian limbs. The sarong is a second skin, Sanath, a second tree, a sapling of the Kohomba. He walks toward my window, arms outstretched. I am paralyzed. The silver in the sky turns blue. Sanath is caught in the burst. On his face is a mark. It is ancient with anguish.

He is whispering something. *Is it my name?*

“A aa.....a raliya...Araliya...A...aaa raliya”

In a sudden, fierce coming to life, I slam the window shut and twist the latch locking it. The silhouette of Sanath’s form lingers outside my window, the palm of his hand on my windowpane. A streak of electrons ravaging the sky illuminates his face. He is alien, gaunt. His palm is a smudge on silica. Water streaming the glass forms minute rivulets around his hand. The little rivers gather at his wrist irate at the hindrance. The lightening is followed by a ragged crack shuddering Catherine’s home. Sanath vanishes into the night, swallowed by thunder. Then, there is nothing but the beating of rain on glass removing traces of a shadow. Glass separates me from the rain. From the tree. From the desperation of liquid, sound and ionized particles surrounding my childhood home.

I dive into bed and huddle beneath the covers sobbing for my Mother Marina.

Days pass. The mood of my family returns to the beat of an obscure metronome. Arjuna and I invent our selves anew each day. Heroes and dragons emerge in the wake of our parents’ absence. We understand implicitly with no discussion that the threat of Navaloka Sadhu is real. We stay clear of Bram Stoker’s monster. I have yet to apologize to Soma. Why can’t I do it? She glances at me ever so often, a look of bewildered resignation on her face. “*Yaksha adambara lamayek!* Devilish proud child!” I hear her complain to Sinne Aiyar.

Arjuna and I play at mimicking Catherine and Sanath Mama. He instructs me.

“*You* can be Arrchie ok? ok start..”

I lengthen my torso, protracting myself heavenward. Lifting my nose in the air, I wag my finger at Arjuna and hiss.

“I don’t have time to deal with this *nadagama* right now! *No discipline*, no discipline *at all!*”

We howl with laughter.

“Ok, *my* turn.” Arjuna tucks an imaginary sarong about his waist, twitching his angelic features monstrously while clutching his crotch. He yells.

“Just b...bb...bbbug bb..ug bug bug bug ger o ooo off and *leave me alone* men!”

My stomach hurts from mirth.

One late evening we are seated at dinner. Roti, dahl curry, mus curry and cutta sambol are on the menu. I love rotis. They lie on a platter just beyond my reach, radiating heat. Perfectly circular, some are randomly pockmarked where the dough became singed from a sizzling pan. A few are crisp. I cannot restrain myself much longer. Wagging my legs in impatience, I ask my mother if I may have one. “Just to nibble...Amma... *please*”.

"No, Araliya, you know we have to wait for Sanath Mama, please be patient putha"

"I wonder why he is late?" My Father looks puzzled, annoyed. "I'll check." He lifts heavily from his chair, dragging it back from the table. Walking away from the dining room, he disappears through the heavy set of doors into the corridor of ghosts.

Eons pass before we hear his voice, urgent, commanding. It is hurled through the open doorway into the dining room.

"Marina! Marina! Get the servants! Get some torches! We need to hurry! Hurry!"

Pandemonium breaks loose. My mother, grandmother, Arjuna and I run toward my father's voice. My mother yells instructions to the servants while querying my father.

"Why? Why ah? Where is he Tilak? Where is he? "

"We need to hurry Marina!" My father is running toward the front porch. "He is not in his room. Just this damn note asking us to read some letter by the well!" I sense defeat in his tone. His face is haggard, beyond recognition. My Mother's arms reach out to him. He is beyond her grasp. He tosses a piece of paper on the floor. Arjuna bends, picking it up he hands it to my Mother.

It is a still, clear, spectacular night.

A parade of humans follow my father as we hustle, stumble and run toward the well at the far corner of my grandmother Catherine's estate. Fire and electric torches illuminate the cobbled path. Patches of light shuddering to and fro occasionally trap a startled toad that leaps toward the safety of dewed grass, dodging the advancing stampede. Shadows of scurrying feet trip and tackle each other. Servant and master become entwined. Trailing the caravan of light and shadow is my grandmother with her own flashlight. She is mumbling a prayer beneath her breath...

"Jesus, Mary Joseph, Jesus Mary Joseph... Jesus Mary Joseph... *Kadewela... eppe enne aniyayum...*

Lord, what misfortune befalls us now? "

We arrive at the well. Hands carrying light are aimed into the yawning mouth. He, Sanath, lies within. Deep within. His form is barely visible. It is pale. He is almost fetal, as though asleep in a woman's womb, at the core of a distant watery realm. He is drowned. My head jerks toward my father's face. My father; the full moon. He is staring at his brother across an eternal divide. Tearing his eyes from the unforgiving breach, he turns to my Mother. His voice is hoarse.

"We need to get him out of there... can you look for that letter?"

"Yes." Her hand reaches for his face. My lips tremble.

My father assigns himself the task of removing his brother Sanath's body from the well. It will take a while though he has the help of Catherine's many menservants. Catherine and my brother become heavily involved in the mass of instructions being given by my father. Arjuna's face is inscrutable.

I glance away from Sanath toward my Mother. He hair is undone, disheveled. It tumbles, dancing on the arch of her back. Her eyes are enormous. It is uncanny. Her beauty.

My Mother has found the letter. It is tucked neatly into a gap in the stone wall where usually a little bowl of fragrant *saman pichche*⁷ is placed by Soma for my Mother's bath. Amma clutches the dampened piece of paper in her hand and turns back toward the house. Her right hand lifts her sari away from her feet. I stumble after her. Our retreat goes unnoticed.

We walk in starlight, the border of her sari potta clenched in my hand. She walks slowly. I feel I am dreaming. Dreaming of *saman pichche*, dreaming of roti, dreaming of the scent of araliya⁸, my name against my skin. My stomach rumbles with hunger. Is it a dream that Sanath Mama has drowned?

⁷ Jasmine

⁸ Plumeria

"Amma, am I dreaming?"

"No putha, no..."

Under the fickle light of the fire torches at the edge of the porch my mother pauses. Slowly, with great care she unfolds the crumpled, damp note. I crane my neck, raising myself on tiptoe to peer over her arm. It is not a letter at all. It is a drawing. A bright happy house is surrounded by trees and grass. Banana trees, mango trees and palms. In the foreground are four stick people holding hands. A father, a mother, a son, a daughter. They have smiles on their faces. In a clear cloudless sky, endlessly pastel blue is an infinite sun, bold and yellow. Its rays fill the drawing, bathing the whole in gold. My mother's body shakes. The sound escaping her lips is caught and held by the great Kohomba. The tree under which Arjuna and I play batta, under which Sanath sat on the night of the storm. Upon the sun is scrawled, in a childish hand 'Sanath'.

Sanath Mama is in the sky. He is not the dark side of the moon. He is the orange sun and my father, the full moon. On the Poya day of each month, my father emerges dutifully. Arched and silver, he rises from the embers of the setting sun, scattering the light he is gifted through the nights of this earth.

Now. I listen for the music from a distant sky. It reaches me across the oceans, carrying me back to Lanka.

Two Poems

Ariyawansa Ranaweera

MOUNTAIN PEAK AND THE MOON

The moon
comes rising
above the
mountain top
A bit of moonlight
touches
the mountain top too

Yearning for
this moment
to come
the mountain top
bears up
the hottest
summer day

Can anyone build
a fence
round the moon
Can a moon stop
her journeying round

How many mountain tops
wait thirsting
for the moonlight
the moon needs
to console them
all alike

BORDER LANDS

You who are sleeping on the borderlands
Keeping death for your pillow
Are you the monarchs
of some kingdom beyond laughter and tears

In the many long nights waiting for
The vehicles of sleep
to come do you embark
on another journey in the mind
shredding the wrinkles in the body
becoming young again briefly

when you see the rich earth
bearing the fruit laden groves of trees
when the blue springs
invite you to step in to bathe

Is it repelling to step
on to earth as before
To soak your fingers in the water
and suck the rich earth
with the wetness

The fruits
ripe to the core
Biting them to the very marrow
spilling the Juice
on either side
of the mouth
eating the fruits
with relish
Does the thought now
provoke
a sense of nausea

Rushing up back
shedding
the clothes of youth
borrowed
in the mind
entering
the wrinkled body again
do you give
a dry smile
which only
your pillow can see

Dreamboats- Short Stories from the Plantations

Edited by M.S. Annaraj & Fr. Paul Caspersz
Sri Lanka, Kandy: Satyodaya Centre, 2004

Ambika Satkunanathan

*"Nine hours a day,
seven times in a week
thus their life-blood flowed,
to fashion this land,
a paradise for some*

*CV Velupillai as quoted
in the introduction to his
book Born to Labour*

This is the story of the Tamil people of the plantations. This is the story set before you by Dreamboats: Short Stories from the Plantations. When I was asked to review "Dreamboats, I'll admit I was a bit apprehensive as I knew that many stories had been translated from Tamil and although my knowledge of Tamil writing and writings from the plantations is limited, I did know that they had a rich history. However I was able to do some research and found as I expected a long and rich history, which I think plays an important role in making the reader aware of the value of this publication. A historical perspective will also reiterate the urgency and importance of encouraging writers from the plantations to engage with the world through the written word. A short historical detour is therefore essential at this point.

The Tamils from the hill country first came to Sri Lanka with hope of a better future but instead found a life much, which subjected them to unimaginable hardship at the hand of the colonizers. Their position did

not improve in independent Sri Lanka either, as they faced disenfranchisement and exploitation by plantation owners, with their plight being ignored by successive governments. Education, the use of language and the written word - means by which the disadvantaged and exploited battle for their cause, was denied to the Tamil people in the plantations. The education of these people was disregarded by both the British and the successive governments in independent Sri Lanka. The British established schools for the children on the estates only in 1906 and that too only up to a few grades. The state of education improved slightly in the 1970s when the Sri Lankan government took over certain estate schools, but on the whole children of Tamils of recent Indian origin continue to have restricted access to education due to structural inequalities and their disadvantaged socio-economic status.

Despite these obstacles some young people in the estates managed to obtain an education through much hardship and the sacrifice of their families. These youth, such as the late R. Sivalingham also became more aware of their rights and began to agitate for better conditions and benefits in the 1950's. The new-found awareness and agitation found expression in political writing and literature.

The very first of these writings was "Urimai Engae" or "Where are our Rights?" by Senthuran, which focused on the issue of citizenship of the Tamils of the Hill country and which was published in 1960.

The Tamils of the Hill Country began to realise the importance of writing one's story, i.e. one's history. They realised that the rendition of the lives of a particular people or community by those outside it can distort the facts unintentionally or sometimes even intentionally. An example of an intentional distortion of facts can be found in the first book to be published about the plantations in 1869 called a Cummi Poem on Coffee Planting with English Translation by Abraham Joseph a conductor of a coffee estate. The life of the workers on the coffee estates portrayed in Abraham Joseph's book was almost unrecognisable for he is said to have shown the worker as someone who after escaping a difficult life in his/her homeland had found a much better and happier life with many benefits on the estates. This he says is because of the plantation owners

who he says should be respected by the workers. Joseph goes to mention that the book contains accurate details of coffee planting methods and the lives of those who work on the estates. So anxious was he to create the perfect picture of life on the coffee plantation that he even rewrote some folk songs sung by the workers because he found they were not respectable enough for him.

Thelivathai Joseph, Thurai Viswanathan and K. Ganesh are writers who with the assistance and encouragement of magazines like *Malligai* edited by Dominic Jeeva, continued the literary trend begun in the 1950s. In this lineage comes *Dreamboats*, which contains stories written in English as well as those translated from Tamil into English. These stories tell of the lives of the Tamils living in the plantations with stark simplicity and amazing economy of words. It is this simplicity, which helps vividly portray the depth of pain and disappointment of these people. The central concern of the stories naturally is the exploitation of the people by the plantation industry, the state and even politicians who claim to work for their benefit. The cycle of poverty, the most often futile attempts of families to break out of it and the continued existence of humanity and concern for others even in the face of such poverty are issues that concern the authors. Women play a central role in many of these stories, such *Rasamma's Pension*, *Ponnie's Happiness*, *Her Decision*, *The Old Woman's Wish*, *The New Year Wasn't New*. The stories portray the woman as most often the primary caregiver of the family who wages daily battles with the kangani, her husband and even the weather, which seem to collectively conspire against her to rob her of her daily pay with which she hopes to feed her children. The women in these stories are not just victims but survivors who sometimes have only sheer determination and hope to see them through to the next day. Despite the difficult and sometimes depressing issues tackled in the stories what stands out is the determination and strength of spirit which one deduces aims to give hope.

Mention also has to be made of the translations and their ability to build bridges. At present there exists a certain cultural space for writing in Tamil and Sinhala. What this means is that these writings occupy a marginal space while writing in English is given prominence. Translations therefore bring writing in Sinhala and Tamil to the centre; it brings it to a different

audience. This collection is quite unique as it not only contains translations of stories written in Tamil into English but also stories which have been translated from Sinhala into Tamil and later into English. It has to be conceded that there is a certain loss associated with translations, i.e. loss of meaning, loss of nuance, loss of variation of speech etc. But as Salman Rushdie says 'literature is a means of holding a conversation with the world' hence, the only way to make these writings available to a wider audience is to translate them into other languages. Although F.de Silva in the introduction to C.V. Vellupillai's book says that 'it is when man ceases to be political that he fully becomes man/human' in today's world in order to be treated as human it is important to become political and the written word is one way in which one can become so. These writings then form an integral part of the struggle of the Tamil people of the plantations to be heard.

I would like to end with another quote from C.V. Vellupillai's book:

*I lost my dear country
With its palm grove
In this far famed Kandi
I lost my mother and home*

Submissions

Send manuscripts to the Editor, Nethra, 2 Kynsey Terrace, Colombo 8, Sri Lanka. E-mail submissions (nethra@icescolombo.org) will also be considered. Manuscripts should be typed and double-spaced. Please include your contact details. We will consider manuscripts in the following subject areas:

- Literary fiction (no genre fiction, such as sci-fi, thrillers, or romance)
- Cultural studies
- Pop culture
- Political/sociological studies
- Gay and lesbian literature
- Visual art
- Multicultural literature
- Book Reviews
- Film reviews
- Poetry

Mariah Lukmanjee
Veiling & other stories

Mangalika de Silva
**War, Peace, Feminism and the
Paradox of Freedom**

Jean Arasanayagam
Three Poems

Ariyawansa Ranaweera
Two Poems

Gehan de Chickera
Cartoon World

Mahangu Weerasinghe
Dirges

Rosemary Alles
The Letter

Ambika Satkunanathan
**Dreamboats- Short Stories from the
Plantations**