

Untitled

'Chitra'

The bed
 Made from wood of a tree, nurtured in the
 Vanni forest
 The tree bears fruits, yellow, plump, small
 and sticky, very sweet
 Honey-filled flowers
 The old carpenter carved its legs and drew motifs
 The sweet aroma and taste stem from the bed mixed with
 the scent of my child who sleeps on it
 I softly touch it
 And the finger tastes like manna.

Under the bed lie many stories of many people
 Who disappeared forty years ago, near Kalani
 Gangai
 Story of a friend who walked along Bullers road,
 happily thinking of his new-born
 Her face yet to see
 She grew up seeing him in a photo
 Of a student who was taken amidst her protesting
 shouts near the Ananda Coomaraswamy
 residence of Jaffna University
 Twenty-five years ago
 Never seen again
 Her earrings returned to her sister
 A letter written on a crumpled paper

With the name of her husband in prison without
 charge for years
 Her voice trembling "I am afraid"
 All piled up underneath the bed
 The questions, protests of many
 Outpouring of anger, tears, years of frustrations
 The bed listens to all of them
 Stories of the hundred and fifty-eight families
 around the Eastern University
 Of thousands humiliated when crossing
 checkpoints
 Written and told in various phrasings
 Waiting to be heard in the corridors of justice
 Lend me the bed for a day
 I will drink all the stories, histories, her stories
 I become a silver urn studded with blue stars
 Will transform the bed into a mat woven with
 purple, red and green
 The mat will fly the urn to the goddess of justice.

It will
 Fly back to the room with a window,
 through which a creeper peeps
 Return to its original form
 On which the child sleeps
 To the lullaby sung by her mother.

'Chitra' is the pen name of **Sitralega Maunaguru**, formerly Professor of Tamil at the Eastern University of Sri Lanka. This poem was composed in Tamil on 25 January 2017.

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