
recreation industry will effectively privatise long tracts of our beaches. There will of course be some local beneficiaries but many small fishers including women are likely to lose their traditional livelihoods and become displaced and unemployed or underemployed. This is why we are speaking of a second tsunami and the only way to prevent it is to defend the right to livelihood of the vulnerable sections of the coastal communities.’ Campaigns and protests have already been mounted in the South and in the East. The signs are clear that the people are not happy with the government’s policy and its handling of the post-tsunami recovery. In many parts of the North-East, post tsunami reconstruction cannot

easily be separated from the tasks of rebuilding war-torn communities and livelihoods. The government and the LTTE have yet to reach an understanding regarding a joint mechanism for reconstruction. An opportunity to link reconstruction, reconciliation and peacebuilding seems to be drifting away. The use of emergency regulations and militarisation to enforce the buffer zone is ill advised. The consequences could be disastrous if this is not abandoned in favour of a better informed and more realistic approach that would take account of the ecological and socio-economic variations and the views of the affected people in the coastal zones. ■

TSUNAMI

“The fountains of the great deep opened up” (Genesis, chapters 6-8)

It’s a sunny morning
A new day.

Aftermath.

Kites soaring high in the air
with dazzling wings
borne on trapezes of eddying wind.

At our gate a young boy stands, smiling,
green trap net in his hand
to capture the rebel bird that has escaped
from our neighbour’s pet shop

How long will its freedom last,
this leaf camouflaged budgerigar
nestling among the throttling epiphytes
that choke and strangle the rough barked
Bottle Brush tree noosing its torso and
branches with thick, twining lianas
of strong hemp-like ropes.

Will the smiling boy capture the bird?
Will it go back into its prison?
Will the babel of bird cries down the
Single note of piercing grief?

The bird climbs higher and higher,
its tiny wings carry it to the upper
branches, hidden within the recessed shadows.
Disappears.

“It won’t last long on its own,
predators will destroy it,” the searchers say.

Frail, vulnerable bird its fate to us humans
unknown, our own instincts for survival,
blunted.

Frail bird, frail children, frail beings,
For some the yawning sea bed a revelation,
a gasp between life and death,
reminders of Israelite exodus when the wall of
waters submerged the dry land, the horses,
chariots, the horsemen, the Egyptian host
all living beings left dead upon the shore

For others, entangled in vast steel nets of
waves it was the hungry oceans abundant
catch, gorged on, ingested, sucked in,
swept away, beyond, beyond, beyond all retrieval.

The subtle treason of poetry
deludes our senses, colours, sound, movement
create endless metaphors for the sea,

now the azure wave clamps down
clutching with strong tearing talons
the tender flesh cleaving to life,
the strand slipping away
into the breathless seas.

Wiped of the face of creation,
a world of lost maps, lost islands
lost lives, lost minds, blot out existence.

Those who are left escape into a void of
nothingness, walk distraught on nowhere
roads to nowhere destinations,

bedlam echoes on our quiet shores and sanctuaries,
lost faces blur on vanishing horizons
each face tattered wrinkled flag,
pennants of defeat in nature's conquest,
limp bodies spangling the branches of
weeping trees.

pinned down, beneath the fallen walls
the mangled forms of children

Every pore, every crevice of the waking
consciousness overcome by odours of
putrefaction where once this tragic flesh
was warm, instinct with breath and life
Gigantic plumes of surf rise,
stun the air,

Waves swoop down to clutch
the writhing bodies so soon breath-quenched,

the winding sheets of waves are torn
apart, tattered limbs exposed to sun, to wind,

Now the long slow dinge begins,
the mourning of the bereaved waves
keen on and on,

spewed out upon the grooved sand
ridged with bodies, new furrows appear.

The air is alive with invisible ethereal
wings of hovering spirits weighing down

our leaden souls,
beneath our feet, the surf-edged
waves stampede, ride over a fissured
land,
trees, branches, roots plucked up
with manic hands torn and twisted,
piled up the tumult of crushed debris.

Deep trenches close over mass graves
concealing limbs tangled with the
hopeless plunge of riven flesh,

blood seeps into soil,
what plants, what trees, orchards and
fields will grow to feed the pastured
kine and all this orphaned breed.

We alone are left
in this aftermath of Armageddon.

Our Mourning will not cease

In a surreal landscape
massed behind the skyline
lighting up the macabre darkness
the leaping fires of burning pyres,
wrecked boats, twisted rails, carriages
flung haphazardly, all awry,
with sundered bridges.
an eerie silence hangs its pal
over a voiceless night.

Jean Arasanayagam

Available soon from the SSA

A Nice Bugher girl

by
Jean Arasanayagam