

WAVES OF ONE SEA

– a Tamil Nadu Puppet Play*

by
Thomas Lysaght

tom_lysght@yahoo.com

*Four weeks after a Baha'i theatre project was launched – under the auspices of the Baha'i World Centre – to support the core curriculum of the "A" clusters in Tamil Nadu, India, a tsunami devastated that part of Asia.
This play was written in response. It has yet to be produced.

WAVES OF ONE SEA

– a Tamil Nadu Puppet Play

A large cloth backdrop. In front of the tall backdrop is a shorter scrim, resembling a stage, behind which hand-held puppets will appear. "Villupattu"* MUSICIANS and NARRATORS sit off to the side of the large cloth backdrop.

The Sound of waves gently LAPPING is heard. Above the large backdrop appear cardboard, painted waves. They look like blue commas as they rock gently. The Villupattu MUSICIANS mirror this calm effect with their music.

Gradually, the music RISES till it builds to a frenetic crescendo. CYMBALS and DRUM ROLL clash like thunder and breaking waves. The cardboard waves above the backdrop begin to rock and roll.

A BOY PUPPET appears above the short scrim. He frantically races back and forth.

NARRATOR

Water! The water is coming. Run!
The water is coming. Run! Run!

A GIRL PUPPET appears. The MUSIC rises to a frenzied cacophony of SOUND. The BOY PUPPET clings to the front of the scrim with only his head visible. The GIRL PUPPET clings to the front of the scrim with only her head visible.

ACTORS enter the playing area with long strips of blue ribbon and ripple it, simulating waves that get more and more violent. Both PUPPETS suddenly disappear.

NARRATOR

There was a loud hissing noise, unlike any sound anyone had ever heard before. A savage 'ssssssssss' as the ocean receded, and children ran into the ebbing tide, laughing, pointing at crabs and starfish. Then the hissing beast turned and, like a demon possessed, charged toward the shore, a colossal surge of water reaching the speed of a passenger jet... The waves came down like giant sledge hammers, smashing rows of houses nearest the sea into a rubble of concrete and hatch. Farther inland water rushed into houses, sucking out people and furniture.

CO-NARRATOR

And the children?

NARRATOR

It was especially bad for the children. They could not run fast enough to outrace the water. They were not strong enough swimmers or able to grab onto trees.

The ACTORS ripple the strips of blue ribbon faster and faster. Musicians begin banging WOODEN BLOCKS, creating a frantic pace. When it seems as if it cannot get any faster, the MUSIC suddenly stops. The ACTORS wrap each other in the ribbon and somersault and tumble out of the scene.

Silence. Brief Tableau.

The SOUND of a temple bell, a GONG softly sounds as if signalling the start of meditation. Two ACTORS enter from either side of the playing space. They are wet. They appear to sleepwalk, as if dazed. A YOUNG WOMAN holds schoolbooks to her breast. A FISHERMAN with a wooden oar clutches his fishing nets to his chest, as if embracing his family.

NARRATOR

This village is now a small lake of seawater, poisoned by rotting fish, cows and sheep. Dogs scavenge among the animal corpses for food. A rat the size of a cat, too stunned to move, clings to the thatch of a ruined house. And everywhere, survivors lament their lives.

NOTE: In villupattu tradition, the Narrators may speak the word of the ACTORS as well as of the PUPPETS (or not).

YOUNG WOMAN

What else is there left in life?

NARRATOR

The wave snatched her nine year-old daughter from her family home and pulled her out to sea. She clings now to her daughter's school books.

YOUNG WOMAN

What reason have I to live?

The YOUNG WOMAN raises her hands to the sky in despair and FREEZES.

FISHERMAN

My five-year old son was ripped out of my hands. I hugged him as hard as I could. Squeezing him to my chest. Even when the waves bashed me against snapped off trees and tumbling chunks of concrete blocks, even as my son screamed in terror, I kept our heads above the foaming black water, holding him tight. But then the wave dropped us as quickly as it had snatched us up, and something wooden, a tree or a boat smashed me hard in the back. The force of the sudden blow threw open my arms! The water pulled Rajaraman away and down into a foaming torrent. And all I could do was watch his terrified face till he disappeared beneath the black water. My wife and my son, they are no more.

He drags the fishing net in the dust and drops his head.

FISHERMAN

I am the only one in my family now.

NARRATOR

Survivors are left to live with tormenting questions.

CO-NARRATOR

What do they ask?

NARRATOR

Could I have done something more?
Did I try hard enough to save my children who could not save themselves?

SUMATEE enters with wet hair.

SUMATEE

I do not ask such questions! I am the only one in my family now. A family of four swept away by the sea. I have other questions to ask.

NARRATOR

What questions do you ask?

SUMATEE

Why?

GONG sounds.

SUMATEE

Why?

GONG sounds.

SUMATEE

Why?!

NARRATOR

Can you tell us what happened?

SUMATEE

I was out in back doing the wash. I thought I heard a loud crackling noise, as if an enormous fire was racing through the village. I went into the house, and my son came running shouting, "The water is coming! Run!" My daughter came running behind him, but before I could say a word, the angry sea invaded our home. A thick, black mass of water. I was thrown up to the ceiling, then back down with the ceiling. My son and daughter were swept away as the water retreated. In the last second I saw them alive, they were desperately clinging to the windowsill, before the water pulled them away... I swam in the waters, calling their names. I grabbed a tree branch as it swept past. I saved myself. Why could I not save my children?

YOUNG WOMAN

(weeping; clutching books)

Every time I washed my daughter's hair she cried if I used too much water. I can't imagine how she felt under that wall of water!

(buries face in hands)

Oh, what sin did I commit? God Almighty, why did you take my daughter?

FISHERMAN

(clutching nets)

My wife and my son...

(MORE)

FISHERMAN (cont'd)

I have not found their bodies. So there cannot be a burial or good-bye. My heart is as empty as the sea is deep! My God, what did I do wrong to deserve this?

SUMATEE

Nothing!

YOUNG WOMAN

What else is there left in life?

FISHERMAN

What reason have I to live?

SUMATEE

To know why! Is that not reason enough to live?

YOUNG WOMAN

The sea has punished us. For the wrong we have done on land.

SUMATEE

'Wrong'! I did nothing wrong! What 'wrong'? And even if I had done wrong, what wrong did my children do to deserve such a death as this? None! No wrong! THIS is a wrong! The gods must answer for THEIR wrong-doing!

YOUNG WOMAN

(to Fisherman)

She always was too proud. She has rightly been brought low.

FISHERMAN

She accepts not her fate.

SUMATEE

Fate? No! Why should I accept fate?

(to Young Woman)

My children - were they rightly brought low for my pride? What kind of God punishes children for the sins of their mother? It was not my fault and it was not your fault! It is God's fault!

The YOUNG WOMAN points to the religious images on the short scrim.

YOUNG WOMAN

You see. The temple icons are not
damaged. They alone survive intact.
It is a sign.

SUMATEE knocks over the icons. CLASH of the drums. GASP from
the actors.

SUMATEE

Now they ARE damaged. THIS is a
sign. A sign that I am angry.
That I demand to know why. Why
have the gods done this great
wrong? I demand they answer to me.

DRUM ROLL AND CYMBALS CRASH.

FISHERMAN

I feel very angry with the sea.
If no one had died, we would have
forgiven this. But too many people
were killed. We were friends with
the sea, accustomed to its ways.
But the sea has turned its back on
me.

SUMATEE

It has turned around and stabbed us
in the back. And that we can never
forget.

FISHERMAN

(to sea; to audience)
Why did you do this to us?
(throws down net)
I am fed up with the sea. I never
thought I would say that. The water
has been my friend for thirty
years. But I will never go back
there. Not after this.
(turning)
The sea has seen the last of me.

SUMATEE

Give me your oar. The sea must
answer to me.

The FISHERMAN hands her the oar.

SUMATEE

I will visit every shrine and holy
place until I am given an answer!
(MORE)

SUMATEE (cont'd)

Your oar will be my staff till I am
satisfied. And your net.

He hands her the net.

SUMATEE

For twenty years my husband has
netted fish. Now I must net an
answer to my question. Some god
must answer for this!

YOUNG WOMAN

(appalled)
This is wrong!

SUMATEE

(gesturing at havoc)
THIS is wrong! And the gods must
answer to me!

CYMBALS and DRUM Roll like thunder rumbling. The ACTORS exit
the playing space. New backdrop curtain falls, resembling
Picasso's "Guernica"

NARRATOR

In the market the women are wary.
The fish of today's catch may have
fed on the flesh of the dead. Sick
of the sea, Sumatee goes inland for
answers.

Sumatee enters, wearing a mask of grief. The oar is her
walking staff. The net is draped over her shoulder.
She moves back and forth across the stage.

NARRATOR

She travels from shrine to shrine,
but receives no answer to her
'why?'. She passes fishing boats
washed two miles inland. She passes
dead bodies dangling from trees.
But mostly she passes rows of
bloated corpses. Several dead women
clutch the bodies of babies. At
these sites, Sumatee weeps.

TWO YOUNG MEN with surgical masks and pink gloves move
ominously across the stage.

NARRATOR

In the heat, with nothing to cool
them, the bodies have swollen and
turned black. Hands stick up from
the mud as if asking for help.

(MORE)

NARRATOR (cont'd)

Open eyes stare out of the ooze.
Sumatee sees questions formed on
the opened mouths of all the dead
faces. The stench makes her gag.

Sumatee covers her mouth with the hem of her sari.

NARRATOR

Young men in bands of two and three
spread out like ants foraging the
landscape, looking for the dead,
slipping in and out of the ooze.
They poke with sticks, they prod,
they kick at rocks and look behind
trees...

CO-NARRATOR

(making radio static
SOUNDS)

"Body, body!" crackles over the
radio.

(making radio static
SOUNDS)

"Location?" he asks, then listens
and races off.

The TWO YOUNG MEN rush off stage.

CO-NARRATOR

They are very busy. The smell is
very bad. To stave off
contamination and disease,
officials have ordered them to bury
the bodies in mass graves, in giant
pits, forgoing the usual Hindu
cremation ceremony. And still the
stench of death fills the air, as
hundreds of bodies remain hidden
beneath the sand.

Sumatee, exhausted, stops and looks up at the large backdrop,
as if expecting to see someone. She leans wearily on her oar.

NARRATOR

After many days of pilgrimage,
moving farther inland, Sumatee
arrives exhausted at another
shrine.

A hand-held INNKEEPER PUPPET in a sleeping cap appears behind
the short scrim

NARRATOR

What an odd staff you carry!

SUMATEE

(after her surprise)

It is an oar. Do you not know the sea?

INNKEEPER

No.

SUMATEE

Then you are fortunate.

INNKEEPER

I have heard of the sea.

SUMATEE

Be glad you have never seen the sea.

INNKEEPER

What seek you here?

SUMATEE

An answer.

INNKEEPER

We have no sea for your oar.

SUMATEE

This oar is an accusation.

INNKEEPER

Of whom? Of what?

SUMATEE

Of the King of the Sea. I want to speak with him.

INNKEEPER

We have no sea here. Just sand. Try the coast.

SUMATEE

I have searched every coast, every harbor...

INNKEEPER

It takes a sea to know a sea.

SUMATEE

...and still I walk.

INNKEEPER

Why?

SUMATEE

For hope and understanding.

INNKEEPER

That's a long walk.

SUMATEE

He no doubt is in hiding.

INNKEEPER

Who?

SUMATEE

The King of the Sea.

INNKEEPER

(shrugs)

He isn't here.

SUMATEE

With good cause he hides from me!

INNKEEPER

(yawning)

Wouldn't you rather rest than walk?

SUMATEE

With good cause he hides from my
wrath!

INNKEEPER

Why not rest your wrath? Good
night!

The INNKEEPER PUPPET pulls down the shade of the scrim. With a deep sigh, SUMATEE stretches out on the floor, her arms wrapped around the oar, the net under her head as a pillow.

As she sleeps, the MUSIC lends a surrealistic quality to the scene. The CYMBALS sound a tin-like drum-roll, and an enormous THREE-HEADED PUPPET's head(s) rises slowly from behind the large backdrop curtain. When the heads, almost as large as Sumatee, fully appear, the cymbals CLASH.

THREE-HEADED FIGURE

The shore daily kisses the sea.
And still it knows it not.
The leviathan is sultan of the sea.
And even he knows it not.
Who are you then to question me?

(MORE)

THREE-HEADED FIGURE (cont'd)

(pause)

Your morality is the underbelly of a bug. All mush. No sinew. Your religion is but the shell of that bug. Without the mush. Without the matter. Keep your antennae taut. Don't miss a sound or a smell. It might be the sound and smell of the sea.

As slowly as he appeared, the THREE-HEADED FIGURE sinks below the backdrop.

NARRATOR

Then Sumatee's drowned husband came to her in a dream.

A hand-held HUSBAND PUPPET appears behind the small scrim. It leans on the ledge and looks down at Sumatee. She sits up and faces the audience as she speaks to her HUSBAND behind her.

SUMATEE

I thought you were dead.

HUSBAND

I know.

SUMATEE

I thought—

HUSBAND

I know.

SUMATEE

I don't know—

HUSBAND

Don't think.

SUMATEE

All right.

HUSBAND

It is.

SUMATEE

It is?

HUSBAND

Yes.

SUMATEE

Why?

HUSBAND

Our children – two tender shrubs
from too shady a corner of this
earth – have been uprooted. By the
Great Gardener. But transplanted to
their place in the sun. There they
grow – at last.

The HUSBAND throws her a kiss and disappears. With a smile,
Sumatee, lies back down and sleeps again.

After a beat, another enormous head rises from behind the
large backdrop, but this one rises more rapidly and
ominously. It is the "Black One", KALI, with her red tongue
and necklace of skulls. She rattles her skulls, and the
musicians' WOODEN BLOCKS assist with the sound. Sumatee sits
up with a start.

KALI

Do I look like a Gardener to you?

Sumatee crouches in fear, huddling beneath her oar.

KALI

I reap like a grasshopper. Like
a locust I harvest. This is no
garden. It's a wilderness. And
you're lost.

SUMATEE

H-how do I find my way?

KALI

Good question.

SUMATEE

Have you a good answer?

KALI

Good questions are better.

KALI rattles her skulls and laughs ominously as she sinks
below the large backdrop.

Sumatee collects herself and leans over the short scrim and
shouts down at her PUPPET HUSBAND.

SUMATEE

Husband, what know you of gardening
and farming? You're a fisherman!

Angrily, Sumatee gathers up her net and oar. She shakes her
oar at the sky.

SUMATEE

Brahma, are you floating on your
cosmic sea again?... Vishnu, I'm
not interested in another lotus
from your navel! I want answers!

Sumatee comes downstage. She looks over the heads of the
audience, as if addressing the heavens.

SUMATEE

If ever my grief were measured or
my sorrow placed on a scale, it
would outweigh the sands of Your
sea. That is why I am angry. For
the gods have stung me with trials
no man or woman can endure. It is
not natural for a mother to outlive
her children! Your arrows have
pierced my heart. Make an end of me
too and be done! Snip my life like
a thread. That is my only request.
Why should I stay alive? Is my
heart hard as a rock? All my
strength has left me. Friends are
streams that run dry. You too now
have turned against me. If I
sinned, would I not know? Can't I
tell right from wrong? Show me
where I am wrong. Tell me and I
will be silent. Show me your face!

(pause)

Does my honest speech shame you?
Are you embarrassed by what I have
to say? Man's life is a prison.
Each day he is sentenced to grief.
And you are the jailer. If I have
sinned, what terrible wrong have I
done to deserve this? And my
children, they have done none. Why
do You make us your target? Have
You not planets to spin and stars
to keep twinkling?

Hand puppet INNKEEPER appears in nightcap above scrim.

INNKEEPER

Will you rant and rave all night?
How long will keep up this racket?
Don't you know God never betrays
the innocent, or shakes the hand of
the wicked. You must have done
something wrong!

SUMATEE

Foolish moralist! Your gods are too small. If that's all they tell you, then put them in a drawer of children's toys. I tell you I did no wrong! How can I prove my innocence? Do I have to beg Him for mercy? Is He even listening to my plea? I am guiltless, but his actions convict me. I am blameless, but his choices condemn me. He does not care! He does not distinguish between the sinful and righteous. He blindfolds the eyes of justice and gives free rein to the wicked. Why should I struggle on? I loathe each day of my life.

A hand-held YOUNG WOMAN PUPPET appears beside the INNKEEPER. Holding school books, she looks like the ACTOR YOUNG WOMAN.

YOUNG WOMAN

Are you the first woman to suffer the death of a child? The first widow to walk the earth? Are you God's wife that you should get special treatment? You shake your fist at God as if you were yourself a goddess. You drop! You single drip! How dare you shake your oar at the sea?

INNKEEPER

Go back and build a shrine on a shore, where it helps.

SUMATEE

I did! It was destroyed by the waves!

The MUSIC RUMBLES as it did in the earlier tsunami scene. CYMBALS CLASH.

SUMATEE

Enough with your pious platitudes! "God will provide," you tell me. "It wasn't meant to be. Put it behind you. Go on with your life!" Bah! This IS my life! How can I put it behind me? Am I a steel train on rails to just move on?

(MORE)

SUMATEE (cont'd)

I am a tree, rooted to this spot
with all the storms of my life
within me, all lightning bolt scars
still upon me. See how winds of
adversity bend me?

Now a hand-held FISHERMAN PUPPET appears beside the INNKEEPER
and YOUNG WOMAN PUPPETS. He is holding a net and resembles
the ACTOR FISHERMAN seen earlier.

FISHERMAN

Come now and repent of your sins.
Open your heart to God.

SUMATEE

(stunned)

Even you think I've sinned?

FISHERMAN

Wash your hands of your wickedness.

Sumatee shakes her head and staggers back.

SUMATEE

Do we just drop to the ground like
dung and say, "thank you, God, for
creating me?" Like fruit fallen
from a tree, should we just roll
over and rot?

(raises oar to the sky)

Can't He tell right from wrong?
Can't He keep his accounts in
order? My children were guiltless!

INNKEEPER

Haven't you talked with the
tourists and travelers? Don't you
know the wicked are always
rewarded?

FISHERMAN

The rich and powerful are never
punished.

YOUNG WOMAN

They are carried in ceremony to
cemeteries.

INNKEEPER

Thousands weep over their graves.

FISHERMAN

Flowers bloom above their buried
bodies.

SUMATEE

How hollow your "right and wrong"
reasoning echoes in my ears! Your
answers are empty as church pews.

(dismissive gesture)

Why do I even talk to you? I take
my complaint to God!

(shaking oar to the sky)

Do you hear? I want to speak before
Brahma Himself! To present my case
in His court!

(to PUPPETS)

He alone knows I am innocent. While
you fools keep trying to dig up a
reason, a crime or some sin I have
done.

She paces back and forth, looking over the heads of the
audience.

SUMATEE

I swear by God, who has wronged me
and filled my cup with despair,
that while there is life yet in me,
for as long as my body breathes, I
will never let you or Him convict
or accuse me. I will never give up
my claim. I will hold tight to my
innocence - and never submit to any
guilt for anything I have done to
deserve this. And this oar is my
constant accusation! This
indictment I will ever carry with
me!

Sumatee comes forward and shouts over the heads of the
audience.

Brahma! I don't care if You kill
me! I will not be still! I insist
on speaking the truth to Your face!
Brahma, are you there? Hear my
words! Listen to me! Pay close
attention to my case. For I have
prepared my defense against You -
and know that I am right. Brahma!
Why do You hide Your face!

Once again the CYMBALS sound a tin-like drum-roll, as the
enormous THREE-HEADED puppet rises slowly above the backdrop.
Facing the audience, SUMATEE drops her oar and staggers in
awe. When the three heads fully appear, the cymbals CLASH.

THREE-HEADED FIGURE

Do you come to the beach and
complain of sand?

SUMATEE

(awed)

Who-who are you?

Both SUMATEE and the THREE-HEADED FIGURE face forward as He speaks. She looks up and over the heads of the audience as she listens.

THREE-HEADED FIGURE

Where were you when the Almighty
sent the earth spinning into orbit?
Tell me if you are so wise. Have
you ever commanded dawn to break?
Or guided the setting sun into the
sea? Can you create a cloud? Blow a
breeze into a wind? Do you tell the
cow to calve? Or ease her when she
groans in labor? Do you give
strength to the tiger? Or paint on
her stripes that strike terror?
Do you teach the hawk to swoop?
Or show bees how to make honey?...
Speak up if your hand is as the
hand of God! If not, keep still and
listen.

(beat)

So God is wrong when you think
you're right? Did you or did God
fill the sea with fish? Who's fed
your family all these years?
Harness the whale and ride the
waves, if you're so smart.

Facing forward, SUMATEE remains silent.

THREE-HEADED FIGURE

Has God's accuser lost her tongue?
Has Almighty God's critic resigned?

SUMATEE

I'm still waiting for a good
reason.

THREE-HEADED FIGURE

Then listen well – with more than
your ears.... Waves rise and break
by *His* decree.

(MORE)

THREE-HEADED FIGURE (cont'd)

When He sets the oceans seething
and lashes the sea into foam, when
He wills the waters to cover the
earth with wetness, He does so in
His wisdom. Not with your
understanding. Your mind is no net
for catching water. The drum cannot
know its drummer, no matter how
loud it pounds. What mind can trap
the truth? What spider can catch an
eagle in its web? No concept can
encompass God.

The THREE-HEADED FIGURE turns to reveal his other faces
and then begins to rise above the backdrop curtain as MUSIC
builds. His body as an enormous five-meter high PUPPET
gradually appears. His hands rise with power and authority.
In awe SUMATEE sinks to her knees.

The painted cardboard waves appear in front of THREE-HEADED
FIGURE above the backdrop. They begin to gently ripple.

SUMATEE

You have taken the form of a woman.

THREE-HEADED FIGURE

I am formless.

SUMATEE

Are you a man or a woman?

THREE-HEADED FIGURE

I am all forms. Be not fooled by
forms. The sea is more than its
waves.

SUMATEE

The sea?

THREE-HEADED FIGURE

So long as space remains, so
long as breathing beings exist,
I remain, to help, to serve, to
make known the Greater Will.

SUMATEE

Oh Bodhisatva, thank you!
Thank you, thank you, thank you.
You can help me get my children
from the sea.

THREE-HEADED FIGURE

I am the sea.

SUMATEE

(stepping back;
exclaiming)

No!

THREE-HEADED FIGURE

"Immerse yourself in the ocean of
My words..."

SUMATEE

No!

THREE-HEADED FIGURE

"...that ye may unravel its
secrets. Discover all the pearls of
wisdom that lie hid in its
depths."1

SUMATEE

No, no, no! I have tried to
understand you, to know your
fickle tides. All my life I have
lived by your side. I have watched
your ebbing and flowing, your
taking my husband each dawn from
me. I have fed your fish to my
children, healed them with your
oils... But you never said the
price I must pay! "Immerse yourself
in me," you say. I spit into you.
(spits)

THREE-HEADED FIGURE

You come to my shore, roaring like
the mouth of a river. Empty
yourself in me!

SUMATEE

(spitting again)

There!

THREE-HEADED FIGURE

Be a drop no longer. Cling not to
form. Be as salt and dissolve in me
or lose your chance to savor.

SUMATEE

No!

THREE-HEADED FIGURE

"A dewdrop out of this ocean would,
suffice to..."

SUMATEE

I want my children, not you! I want
my family back!

Silence. Her voice REVERBERATES. Brief tableau.
Downstage, facing audience, SUMATEE begins to sift the ocean
with her net. She is soon doing so frantically.

SUMATEE

I want my children!

THREE-HEADED FIGURE

You have your children. They cannot
leave you.

A BOY PUPPET and a GIRL PUPPET appear above the puppet scrim.

THREE-HEADED FIGURE

See!

SUMATEE

(sifting)

Liar!

THREE-HEADED FIGURE

Look behind you, Sumatee!

SUMATEE

No! I am keeping my eye on you now!
Last time I looked away from you I
lost them!

The BOY PUPPET and GIRL PUPPET wave to Sumatee, but she does
not notice them.

BOY PUPPET

(frantically)

The water is coming. Run! The water
is coming. Run!

GIRL PUPPET

Don't say that!

BOY PUPPET

(laughs)

I'm only joking.

GIRL PUPPET

It isn't funny. You'll frighten
Mama.

BOY PUPPET
Is she still sad?

GIRL PUPPET
Yes.

Both PUPPETS face froward as they watch SUMATEE, sitting back on her heels as she sifts the sea.

BOY PUPPET
I don't understand. Why is Mama still sad?

GIRL PUPPET
She doesn't see us.

BOY PUPPET
(waving)
Mama! Mama! Yoo-hoo!

GIRL PUPPET
(waving)
Mama! Hi, Mama!

BOY PUPPET
Over here! Look, Mama!

They keep frantically waving and straining to catch SUMATEE's attention. Finally, they give up. With a sigh, they shake their puppet heads.

BOY PUPPET
(after a beat)
Can we give her some of what we have?

GIRL PUPPET
She doesn't want any.

Pause.

BOY PUPPET
(turns)
How do you know?

GIRL PUPPET
She said so.

BOY PUPPET nods. Pause.

BOY PUPPET
Doesn't she see we're okay?

GIRL PUPPET shakes her head.

BOY PUPPET
Tell her we're okay.

GIRL PUPPET
I did.

BOY PUPPET
That the sea only takes the living.

GIRL PUPPET
We did. Remember?

BOY PUPPET
Tell her again.

GIRL PUPPET
(with a sigh; shouting)
The sea only takes the living!

BOY PUPPET
Tell her only the dead are washed
ashore.

GIRL PUPPET
(shouting)
Only the dead are cast ashore,
Mama! We're alive!

Pause.

BOY PUPPET
Well?

GIRL PUPPET
I told her.

BOY PUPPET
And?

GIRL PUPPET
She doesn't hear.

BOY PUPPET
She doesn't hear or she doesn't
see?

GIRL PUPPET
Both.

GIRL PUPPET shakes her head. Both PUPPETS then sigh and rest
their chins in the hands.

BOY PUPPET

Now what?

GIRL PUPPET

(shrugs)

I don't know.

BOY PUPPET

She looks sad again.

GIRL PUPPET

I know.

BOY PUPPET

She's crying again.

GIRL PUPPET

We're just tears in her eyes, I suppose.

BOY PUPPET

(excited)

That's it!

GIRL PUPPET

What?

BOY PUPPET

Tears! Tears are salt water!

GIRL PUPPET

I know.

BOY PUPPET

(still excited)

But does Mama know?

GIRL PUPPET shrugs.

BOY PUPPET

Somebody has to tell her!

GIRL PUPPET

I did.

BOY PUPPET

You did?.. And what happened?

GIRL PUPPET

I asked.

BOY PUPPET

What did you ask?

GIRL PUPPET

I asked that she might see. Through
her tears.

BOY PUPPET

Did she?

GIRL PUPPET

No.

BOY PUPPET

Let's ask the sea again.

GIRL PUPPET

For what?

BOY PUPPET

Maybe for her to hear! If she puts
a shell to her ear, she can hear.

GIRL PUPPET

Maybe.

BOY PUPPET

Or we could ask for fish. She looks
hungry.

GIRL PUPPET

She does.

BOY PUPPET

Okay?

GIRL PUPPET

Okay what?

BOY PUPPET

Let's ask for fish - and some
peace.

GIRL PUPPET

A piece of what?

BOY PUPPET

Peace, peace. Mama doesn't look
peaceful. So long as we can ask
for- Let's ask for peace.

GIRL PUPPET

Okay.

BOY PUPPET
But still ask for her to see us.

GIRL PUPPET
I will.

BOY PUPPET
It's good we can ask so many things
for her.

GIRL PUPPET
She's bound to get happy.

BOY PUPPET
You think?

GIRL PUPPET
I hope.

BOY PUPPET
Me too.
(beat)
What do you hope?

GIRL PUPPET
(shrugs)
That Mama isn't so sad.

BOY PUPPET
Yeah..

GIRL PUPPET
That she can see we're happy.

BOY PUPPET
Yeah... So *she* can be happy.

GIRL PUPPET
So she can see we're the sea.

BOY PUPPET
Are we?

GIRL PUPPET
Definitely. I'm no drop.

SOUND of waves gently LAPPING. SUMATEE continues sifting.
LIGHTS fade slowly.

BOY
I'm not a drop either!

GIRL PUPPET

I know.

BOY PUPPET

You're not a drop, Mama!

GIRL PUPPET

She doesn't hear you.

BOY PUPPET

Not yet. But she might.

GIRL PUPPET

She might see you too.

BOY PUPPET

(excitedly)
Do you think?

GIRL PUPPET

Yes.
(nods; smiles; waves)
Good night, mama.

BOY

(waving)
Good night, Mama!

LIGHTS fade. Not hearing them, SUMATEE rolls up her net of fish, looks up and sighs. She then takes up the oar, ties a white flag of mourning to it, plants it in the ground. She looks up at the sky and sighs, then exits with her empty net, wrapped around her like a shawl for comfort.
LIGHTS fade to BLACK.

FINIS

by THOMAS LYSAGHT

3/28/05

* "Villu pattu" – or "bow song" is the traditional form of storytelling in Tamil Nadu, India. The main instrument is a bow with many small bells tied on the bowstring. The main storyteller narrates the story while striking the bow. The bow rests on a mud pot kept facing downward. Another musician beats the pot while singing. A co-singer plays the role of active listener by saying "yes, yes" or "is it so?", not unlike a Baptist congregation's shouting "Tell it!" and "Amen". An hour-glass shaped drum called the "Udukkai (associated with Shiva) is the primary percussion instrument.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitab-i-Aqdas* 85

Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings* 326

Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings* 279-280