

POEMS



S. MURALI
conversations with
children

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CONVERSATIONS WITH CHILDREN

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S. Murali

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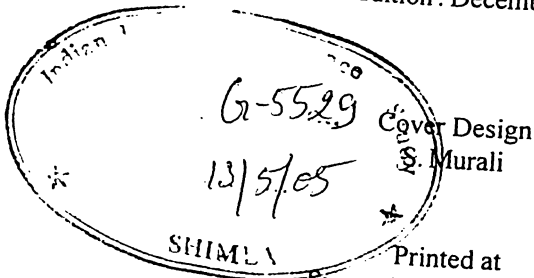
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Conversations with Children
Poetry

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Above all
for Appa
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A PREFACE TO POETRY

It is an inordinate task--to frame a preface to poetry. Because poetry comes faceless, untimed and unannounced. It occurs. Like the tiny foot prints left on the wet earth of a morning after a night of rain by the myna birds waking earlier than the dawn, poetry begins in fits and starts and tapers off here and there. One cannot write poetry; poetry writes one. Heidegger asked: who is a poet? He answered: one who writes poetry. And then the question came: what is poetry? The answer: that which is created by the poet. The poet and the poem are one—each given birth to by the other in an existential chain. Then how does this happen? I feel now a familiar tightening in my throat; I mistake it for simple thirst, drink amazingly large quantities of water, it refuses to let go. Then poetry is the natural choice. The words choose me, I don't do anything. But of course afterwards there is this cutting, pruning and grafting. Each word has occurred in the deep blueness of the sky, in the dark greenness of the earth, in the brown, purple, red, orange yellow white it is all white now... Perhaps there is this golden oriole in the mango trees, or the crow in the backyard plantain, magpie robin among neems...Once or twice it is a blind boy wandering through narrow corridors of time, otherwise it is a vender with the broken leg dragging

one leg after the other in an eager attempt to get somewhere. The perfume of sandalwood is in the air. Ripe mangoes Ripening plantains. Overripe jack fruits. The grass is so overwet with rain that now there are many many worlds doing the whirligig. What has happened to all familiar faces? Where is that little boy who wandered the fields with the myna bird perched on his shoulders and nibbling his ears? Where are the songs and kites? The long long summer afternoons. Everything appeared unending. So much pain and so much to laugh about. Why is there so much more of pain than pleasure? Why so much suffering, death, separation and parting? Do we receive more than we lose? More than anything it is the incomprehensibility of life. Then love—the bitter-sweetness of desire, longing. The body with its burden of sensualities, the amazement of each sense. The sheer wonder of being. There is this crystallizing around a disordered image, perhaps. Or is it the other way round? The image surfaces with a new face from the debris of some experience. The words are like serpents curling and uncurling, whisking past, sometimes too slow, slow enough to be caught on the page; otherwise dropping off like leaves from a slackened stem. The song remains stuck to the open page—poetry, we call it.

S. Murali

I like to let the word fly about

I like to let the word fly about
Not tied down to its meanings
Like a dog on a leash
And be walked on the beach.

But let it prance around, flip and turn
And perch on the tiniest branch
Of suspense and dream
In the balmy glow of a rainbow
Like a crazy cormorant
Caring not a fig for gravity.

I like to let the word
Make mouths of mockery
At those who take it to mean
Like sea and sea weed moth-green

I like to clutch them and scooping
Fling handfuls into the sky
And watch them rain
Poetry.

The word is gone, the word is gone

The word is gone, the word is gone.
You cannot split its shadow on the wall.
The bell is rung, the flowers strung.
Who can unsettle it once it fell?
The mountain is still by the sea.
Birdless silence straddles the dark road.
Monsoon –threaded a moon half floats
The day is done. The word is gone.
Shut the window, draw the shades
Light the lamp to spill the gloom.
The leaf is laid, the mantra chanted.
When all is said the word is gone.

Flying Kites

Such a lot of kites – some misshapen
Some straight and sombre, streaming like full sails,
Some as if caught unawares
Tailless and turning bright
Somersaults, hanging,
Reluctant to let go.

Such now is my wish to go back and forth
In the vacant breeze strung between
Heaven and earth, just touching
The earth's other shore.
But who is it on this side
Gently tugging and toeing
Singing in the open sky?
What is this song
That hangs loose
Like an unattached thread
across the afternoon's shoulders?

Flying kites
Is not such simple affair, after all.
Do you know which way it blows?
How to fling the square thing
And when to let go
The unwinding string, tug and pull?

The eye dwells on wanton wings
Patched up in patterns when you look up—
Such a lot of kites.
The sky is so full
Of moving holes now!

Ekalavya

All things for all are never the same.
For instance this sky and earth

Fused as one like
Feather and shaft.

Like this wide water
And fire—

Like my sliced thumb;
Never again the same for me

As for them.
Their dogs are still out there, somewhere.

Tongues stitched to their open jaws.
Witness the relics of my achieved archery.

Still can I feel
The grip of feather and leather

Against my cheek—
Fused like the sky and earth.

My bare hands are freer now
Swift yet my arrows could fly

Seeking no mark.
—my guru's desire

Forged in anguish of that one great warrior
Split through my right thumb:

Conversations with Children

It was my bow string that did the rest.
My thumb now lies shriveled beside his idol.

Will I prove to be
Mightier by far—I know not yet.

How did I fail to discern that simple *truth*
That heads beyond the knower?

The fear that lurks beneath the idol?
That fire of self seeking ambition?

Like deer to hound
And hound to hunter

I am bound, body and soul
To this shattered stone visage.

Why turn that stone over now?
Let it remain forever in its moral guise.

Unhook the eagle from the skies.
Pluck out the fish from the water.

And yet who can figure out the acts of men?
Nothing's ever the same for all.

If I speak or sing, they'll come for my tongue.
My heart, if I love or hate.

Like a torn thumb I now hang
Between devotion and disdain—a mortal remnant—

All green closes round me.
Timeless trees and shrubs,

The endless blue and purple of hills
Lone birds and I wait for the dark lord.

No harp no tapura, I hold nothing.
Except my bow... except my bow.

Garuda

I drifted through vast space
Carving off slices of enormous emptiness.
Scanning below and after
Young time's youthful trajectory.

My claws have just allowed him to slip through
Plunging windward, while all around me
Brahma's whisper echoes wafting and waning
Within the arc of my wide spread wings

Now the gods have woken up—Vishnu
Reaches across for his conch
And Siva rubs his third eye;
Agni and Varuna are reborn.

I move on in concentric circles
Daring Vayu's might, trapped
In the wake of my own unmaking;
Slicing wedge-like, emptiness, wind-treading

Down below me the little Prithwi
Heaves and then settles. Death
Follows birth's mortal coils.
My movement is eternal still.

My shadow straddles the serene cliffs
And sterile deserts; rivers snake off
Trailing in uneasy calm; the ocean swells
Uncertain under my moving shadow.

For now I am Kasyapa's son, staked to time
Slivering across these boundless shores.
Moving and unmoving, above and below,
In the ever new ananda of a million avatars.

Amba Upanishad

Pity lies on the otherside of it all.
My beauty cannot lie. I must die
And yet live beyond my life.

I had not known enough of hate
Before now, to hate so much
All that wrenched my very being away.

Why did the great prince carry me off
Before the watchful eyes of all
Only to leave me go back

Back to my prince? And yet
When he too disowned me, what
Love remained in me dissolved.

The residual hate turned me on my toes
From the sage to that half-brahmin
Taking up arms once again for me.

He too left me splayed like
A lifeless stem wavering
In the arduous breeze, raging wild

In destruction's path. Nothing can stop me now.
Let me reach the true, the vast, the beautiful,
And what is all for my taking.

What matters now to my beauty
That tore the mind of that silly sage
Who would not even look at me?

The great Rama with the Axe, why
Did he swear to haste me to justice
All foreseen and foreknown?

Neither did the great Bheeshma
Look once towards me even as he turned
My life upside down. He is just.

As always. But the love that bore me back
Was just like everything else—insubstantial
It guided me to my destiny.

Pity lies on the other side of it all.
My beauty cannot lie. I must die
And yet live beyond my life.

My hate shall out live Agni's soothing touch.
An inglorious will to prevail beyond
Death and live once again to kill.

So much to conceal

Museums have much to conceal.
Sharing vast spaces amidst printed labels.

Anyway, who reads
Through all the notes and footnotes
Carefully like the mother's tongue
Running over her calf?

Museums have too much to conceal.

Academics are not dissimilar.
Their learning becomes their hood.
Their texts ample pretexts
Labelling only their shared space.
Anyway, who listens to the other?

Academics have too much to conceal

Does the skin conceal or the hood
While the snake slides over smooth round space
leaving an absence behind?
Unreading
Notes, footnotes, labels
Inside the large glasscase

The Cheshire cat's smile
Still hangs over the huge walls
Enduring.

So much to conceal.

Smile

That man knew how to smile, or that's what she
knew, many times as his smile flittered around her moth-like
and his open desire flooded her
with a shudder ... in the long dark corridors,
beside the churchyard, under its shadows.
The steeple its silent witness, as the
dark insect slowly unloosened its wings
and hovered. How else could he have fixed
her to the white sheets while all around her
relatives and friends hurried about with the ceremonies?
When they left her to her hardness of stone
he came for her, smiling. The slow curve of his lips
twitching still. The dead hardly breathe.
Deadlier was his icy desire that pierced her flesh.
She felt the smile widen around her and clutch her
very soul. That man knew how to smile.
He left his smile in the open, nude to the moon.
Can the dead die all over again in the fear of the living?

Note: *In Changanassery, Kerala, a young woman's tomb was found disturbed and her body nude, violated. [Newspaper report-July 1998]*

Passim

As the first cottonseeds broke
and the fluff floated about in the fine breeze,
we ran in circles, you and I, catching the handfuls
only to blow them around;
there was so much to laugh about, drenched in thin shreds....

Safe in your hefty hands I spotted my first bird—
An oriole among the neems; you named it for me.

When you stood with that distant look in your eyes,
coffee-cup in hand, and recited the long narratives
of the nineteenth century poets,
I heard the brooks and hills of some far away land
resound with your clear voice of unreason.

Down by the sea, you and I stood amazed
and watched the sun like an upturned pot
shrink and spread out... between the palms—
sand tingling our eyes and legs.

You had nothing to call your own
not even your beliefs, but only a store of tales about your self
which I listened to wide-eyed.

You'll leave me one day, I know,
like everyone else—an old man, bald, wrinkled, acerbic,
among the aging, dying, parting...

You are no seer, nor even unwise enough
to counsel me. Your wisdom lies like a nimbus
round your portrait that I disfigure.

S. Murali

My mirror does not lie to me about your face
that infringes on my brow.

The plovers leave and return,
the coconut fills with juice again and again,
the jasmine blooms out of all seasons and the cottonseeds
break
all day... O father shall I break this mirror
that reflects everything in the obverse?

I. Bahuka

With bare human sympathy
I turned and dared the jungle fire
hearing those dreadful screams,

and as I lugged out the half-burned serpent
walking but ten paces,
his fangs dug deep into me

and darkened me to my bones;
this my reward for having left you
lone, sleeping peacefully by the river side

homeless, tearing off one portion
of your clothes to cover my own nudity...
I, Bahuka, have forestalled my dreams;

I will not sleep again
nor speak the language of humans;
but suspend my time among horses.

The burdened clouds do not lift.
The face of the sun beams not
from behind; all life avoids me.

Only anguish and emptiness haunt me—
even as I. ..I blundered
into another world—

another name—
where at least the stables
harnessed my dark presence...

S. Murali

And now with furious speed I ride,
faster than sound or sense—my steeds
know my heart's out there

where you stand with the garland
eyes gazing wildly for my elusive shadow.
The king beside me shivers in his silks

and shares with me the marvelous mantra
that will release me from this demonic grip,
now will I be whole once again...

regain mine own
and watch my shadow self
fall apart...I, Bahuka or Nala?

Krishna

Like lines drawn over water
Destiny overflows its own third bank—
Un-writing itself.

Why should it all be otherwise, then,
If he who knew it all let himself
Be carried forth –

Lying he created a world.
Only to swirl down in a final flood
And float downstream,

Unmoving on a tiny leaf,
The child that he is
Trying to hide his own self.

One world and more. Poets
And kings. Armies
Elephants, horses.

All killing each other. Willing
To be someone else.
Un-spaced in death.

Freed from without,
He stood with them
And watched from inside his mortal self.

Great kings, unlimited armies.
Heroes. Wonders. Vengeance
Might. All vanish out of sight.

S. Murali

One final scrap of iron
Battled free, and there was no
Mistaking its end.

What is intention? The ignorant
Hunter never knew
The gravity of his deed.

So he who lived died.
Loving, cheating, teaching.
Immoral to the core.

Letting the world
Unjumble its disordered history
On its own.

Like lines drawn over water
Destiny overflows its own third bank—
Un-writing itself.

Grace

The day dawns as usual over the hills.
A few mynas and crows shake the last
night's dew off from their night boughs.

Just one more squirrel to swing free
from the long casuarina onto the tamarind,
and the rest all awake to another day.

What could one do to keep the mind fresh
as the honey bee's buzz? Forgetful of the night
the dark and the hush of nightmare's bizarre descent?

Listen to the capricious breeze as it filters
through the banyan leaves, pauses and weaves
iridescent metaphors before it leaves its absence?

Or reach out and touch the heart of the wild flower
or the full-bloomed jacaranda by the lake?
What can it mean this welter of nights and days?

What could it all mean this casual entrance and exit?
In the long silence of the jungle trails
in the blossom-headed parakeet's profligate screech

amidst the sand lark's heady ascent
and the silent business of the ant-world
the mystery splits its protean head

only to hide it ostrich-like in the sand dunes
of just another day. The city and the village,
the forest floor and the harvested field,

reel under the shades of mysterious doubts.
What matters is the soul's intense reach
after the glorious uncertainties;

its multiple touch soaked through and through
in the sheer amazement of the senses.
Grace is the faltering of this amazing being.

Grace is the being of this amazing faltering
that this day leaves as any other before and after
with no trace of any having been at all.

My Father and R K Narayan

1

My father's neither the postmaster,
Nor the village schoolmaster,
But just an inspector of police.
He died a few days before R.K. Narayan did,
He just slept through his sleep
And left us mortals forever awake.
To the free fall of words
When the meaning is gently laid aside
When the ashes part in loud silence
And quiet.
Like R.K.Narayan.

2

The monsoon dawns
Shuffle and shiver like black feathers
Against the gray hills. The sun
Hides his face for shame.
The voice of the cuckoo
Breaks over rain-wet plantain leaves.
Only the crows dare
To tell the truth:
Two men have departed:

N. Sivaramakrishnan,
R.K.Narayan—
Two more for Rudraloka
On boats made of sugarcane
Southward bound.

No words can fill that absence
 With meaning.
 What words can refill the meaning
 in absence?
 With what can the drummer drum?
 With what can the piper pipe?
 Where's the space within?
 Where's the honey?
 Where's the fire?
 Where is that Carpenter of Malgudi?

All sounds are dead.
 My father's no more.
 Does Malgudi have a Policeman?
 One that fills days and nights
 With songs and sounds,
 Breaking the stillness and dream,
 With laughter and tears?
 With courage to dare
 The unconcern of the gods?
 Father, by far, was the richer of the two
 In experience. And Narayan, in words.

4

Father never met Narayan
 Nor did Narayan know him
 In flesh or in fiction.
 And yet in me they ford side by side
 The river full of stars—sit
 And chat in familiar ease
 Of men, machines and metaphysics.

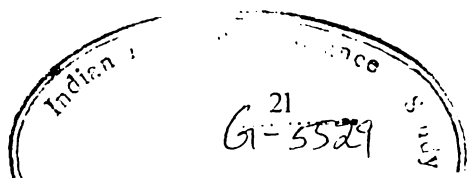
With the living
 The immortals are chained.
 Nor are they out of it.
 The fiction of fiction

Life's designs are too obscure from below.
Perhaps the manes can read
Upwards from the primal seeds of unrest,
Desire, tragedy, all that is this life.
Like the shattering of the first drop of rain
Over the stench of burning bodies
Side by side;
Like the fumes that rise up afterwards

After the mud pot is shattered.
And the space at last becomes one.
The fire, the deed.

A writer's nightmare
The manes' desire
The wonder
The design

The moon rises slow
And heavy in the evening sky.
The rains are over.
Once more the fire, the air.
I tell the truth. I tell it right.
Remembering what is done.
Remembering.



Conversations with Children

Like cows in the mid-stream of highway traffic
nonchalant they stand, letting each word
glide by, dodging and ducking, or with a simple
toss of the head disengaging *artha* from *sabda*

as simple as peeling bananas.

Waste water cascade.

Unsavoury groundnuts

Fly away, fly away word—
there's just not any space for you.

Only the drone of a distant engine
continues. No heat no passion
it's all conversation.

General rules of behaviour. This
side of dos and don'ts. Now the ears
of my ears open—just enough

to let me hear the sound of silence.

Long years of wandering
over the highways and byways
flyovers and subways; each year

like a cobblestone over which
slow carriages move—so much laughter
under the oil-lamp-light.

Conversation is all.

Fly away, fly away word—
there's just not any space for you

Now my children beside me, I sit and watch
the slow fading of light in the new monsoon
trees all agog with words, the wind
and lightning; thunder calls across the sky.
So much meaning being tossed about
in the open. Shall we reach out
and clutch? Conversation is all
empty dispensation of words
a loose cloud over all

Where is the meaning in the crows?
Where is the meaning
in the arch dispensing of the taut rainbow?

Fly away, fly away word—
there's just not any space for you

Karna

This wind will not let me be, I know.
It rakes my insides like a plough
Tearing through the wet earth.
Only this red earth shall remain.

I shall not let a brahmin's curse curb me
From my sworn deeds—my noble friend's
Army shall emerge victorious. What shall
A mere handful do against my might?

But what is this? Where is my trusted charioteer?
Oh, God of my fathers, my horses are unharnessed
And my chariot's unsteady, where's fled the dharma?
Where has the righteous monarch fled?

Now I recall that curse—the virtuous Rama leaped
Forth with beady eyes as he espied the red blood
Oozing from my thighs and the wretched insect
Buzzed off after teasing my wounded might,

Wheeling his mighty battle axe sky high he screamed:
“*The wisdom you have gleaned from me*
Shall be worthless in time of urgent need. You will
Forfeit your skill in the crucial battle grounds”.

Should I now look back like this and fear,
And lose my nerves and cunning—while
My arch enemy—my own dear brother—
Tightens his deadly arrows against his cheek?

Conversations with Children

Should I now reel and buckle like a tremulous
Petal wheeling in the wind? Above me wheel
The darkening skies; three vultures crouch low
And in the distance jackals howl. Death prowls

All around me. Haven't I seen my beloved ones
Fall? Great small and all? Then why this fear?
Whence this quiver? Let my arrows bear witness.
Karna shall ride and fall in all nobility, hear!

Why, once more that brahmin's curse rings clear!
"Your chariot wheel shall be caught in its own furrow
And likewise you will be crushed beside it, unarmed
Dying like a coward!" So my destiny's prewritten

In this blood-wet clod. Unhand me earth and sky
Let me be my bold self, and not shadow-like hide
Always from the light. I am born of the Sun
Bounteous, benevolent, and perfect.

Nothing can hold me back. This wheel will be
My weapon. And I shall fight on foot, until no more
My will shall prevail. Where's Krishna,
Where's he who hides in the light?

Ah! Arjuna's arrows have found their inglorious mark.
My heart's split and my life-blood's oozing free
Let this earth be wet through and through
Let this ploughing wind tear her life lines.

Oh, earth, hearken to my feeble breath. Feel my
Final throes. I am betrayed. One more mortal sin
That shall lead the gods to arms. No man shall
Sleep after these gory deeds. The sun shall not rise again.

This wind will not let me be, I know.
It rakes my insides like a plough
Tearing through the wet earth.
Only this red earth shall remain.

In Transit

The red earth heaves and whimpers
In the largeness of the night's dark.
Who is out here
To hear
This far afar?

One twig falls. Then a leaf.
Now another and another.
The monsoon has left in a hurry
Of myna wings. Have I lost my way?
Is it the plain old path?
Now all too unfamiliar
To this old monarch?

What have they done to each other
All my people? When once I sat
Bowed and doubled
Under the crushing weight
Of the mighty one's foot
Pushing me father and farther
Deep into the nether worlds

I had faith.
Faith in my people.
My own blood
My people.

Now unfamiliar even to this wayside shrine
I am lost—another outsider.

New avenues surging into
Byways and highways,

Calamity, disaster and death
Stalking each and all.

Any way, when
The red earth heaves and whimpers
In the largeness of the night's dark,
Who is out here
To hear
This far afar
Except me, the old monarch?

Let me take my leave.

Kaikeyi

Call me by what name you will.
Riding the chariot in furious battle
I saw the loosening axle-shaft
And held on with my bare hands—
My delicate finger steadied the wheel
And the heroic steeds.
Such a simple deed, and yet
It gained me my love's adoration.
I didn't want anything for myself.
I never did. Now, when I did
Desire the throne for my own son
You dubbed me evil and cast me
Into perdition's depths. I know
Rama of the noble soul is my son too.
Dasaratha's darling cannot
Bear out his heroic destiny indoors—
The demons are all about in the far jungles
And across the seas. You saw the
Hunchback hobble, the goddess
Upsetting her utterances, and she is now
The witch for all times. Tuned in epic perfection
The tale is all set to order. My son too
Reads my misdeeds in the text.
I am not too sure of myself anymore.
Call me by what name you will—
Only lead me to my own space
Having disordered an ordered destiny
Let me read myself afresh
In the crushing might of turning wheels.

The Boy and the Mountain

It rained so very heavily
that many villages were washed away
many people and cows
children and calves
began floating and shouting.

The boy could not
find any umbrella.

So he used the mountain
close by.

The mountain was rooted
to the earth.

So he used his little finger
and twirled it.

Men, women,
children, cows and calves
danced beneath.

The Boy and the Twin Trees

There were two trees growing
so close
that they became entwined.
The boy was so mischievous
that he was tied to a grinding stone.
He found it rolled when he yanked it.
He chose the twin trees
crawled between them
and split them.

He was free
and so they were
returned into gods

with separate lives.

All because of the boy and the grinding stone.

Conversations with Children

What She Said

I do not like your discus
or your mace.
Neither your bracelets
nor peacock feather.
But I am madly in love
with your flute
that your lips caress
It has bewitched all the gopis.
At least it is not fake.

S. Murali

What She Saw, He did, and I have Seen

Someone told his mother
that her son was eating earth.
She scolded him and forced
his mouth open. The boy obliged.
When the mother looked in
she saw the fourteen worlds whirl
neither here nor there, but within
the boy—tinier than the tiniest
vaster than the vastest.
She simply fainted.

When the final flood overcame all
he simply swallowed back
and floated gently
on an old fig leaf
down time and space
lonely as ever
but for his little toe
in his tiny mouth.

This I have seen.
Believe me.

Hymns to Shiva

1

Why shower me with these signs?
A flower, a bird, a dead man disfigured
Beyond recognition, a carcass
Shredded by crows—the huge sea
Silent skies—why
Show me all? You know
What I know
After all, this is where you dance
Crushing the demon of desire
Wielding drum and elemental fire

Trickster and scoundrel
Tear me inside out
With ecstasy
The dream the dream

Let me taste that blue poison
That so endeared you to the living

Why shower me with these signs?

2

Not every day
the sun wakes me up

Not every night
the dew lulls me to sleep

S. Murali

Sometimes
Your dance disturbs me

Be kind.
Let me be awake.

3

I guess I am not made of the same stuff
That those saints are made of—I rave
and rant
I do not keep awake for your footfalls
Do you keep an account?
Shall I sleep with the dogs?
Lick gruel from a broken bowl?
Pluck off my eyes? No I guess not.
Let me get this straight.
I am not made of the same stuff
As those dear to you of yore.

My anger spills over my body
My eyes and ears are open to evil.
My hands and heart are constantly up to
mischief.
My tongue relishes all temptation.
Above all I am not good.
Perhaps these times are out of joint!

4

Serpent desire strangles you.
Bull passion rides you rough.
Your consort knows your other side
That your matted hair attempts to hide
You are a large black stone
Submerged in the shallow waters of life
Hidden from no one
Except your self.

There is no Wisdom in Poetry

There is no wisdom in poetry.
Nothing is gained through this
Grafting of words on ideas
Or is it ideas on words?
Better to say goodbye as soon
As you say hello. Better
To hate than to love. Cherish
Not any desire. Never marry.
No children. No friends. None to worry.
Nowhere to hurry.
So why write poetry?
Still the bird cannot but whistle
Deep in side the heart of the bush.
The sky reddens when the sun departs.
A few stars to adorn
The night's rebirth. One moon
Is enough to madden
Every poet's mind.
Lie awake poet, all night, cry.
And do not let this reader know
You lied. Let the words
Slowly through this debris drip
And dare fear and desire.

The Bleeding Tree

There's a tree that bleeds on the hill,
Or so they said. Each time
In the valley a tree is cut or a branch
Broken, a leaf plucked, it bleeds.
Now, I have crossed the river
And taken the roving path
Across the valley. There's no tree
Where they said it stood.
It must have become
A piece of wood
Or a chair or table
A window frame or door knob.
Someone has even thoughtfully
Gouged out its roots—there's only a mound
Of burnt grass here.
The sun is setting beyond the valley.
The river has darkened.
And now in the distant hills
All trees are bleeding, all day.

Afterward

If only we could know
Less of everything.

Disenchantment is the key word
And to reach that far

A falcon's eye, a dragon's mind.
The surface clad with shadow.

The infinite light, the infinite view
Where in this vastness can death hide?

What shall we do with all these
Light, sight, might and knowledge?

A simple seed enfolds a life
As hill and sea gather the land.

Life stretches blue and purple
Rain and sun star and moon

If only we could know
Less of everything.

A little less
Of everything.

A Note on the Poet

S. Murali is a poet, painter and critic - a specialist in Indian Aesthetics and literary theory. He holds a Ph.D in Indian Aesthetics and is a scholar of national repute deeply concerned with indigenous values and environmental issues. He is Reader in the Department of English, Pondicherry University.

He is a well known painter and his works have gone on display at several major exhibitions in India and abroad. He has authored numerous research articles on art, literature and ideas in journals of international repute.

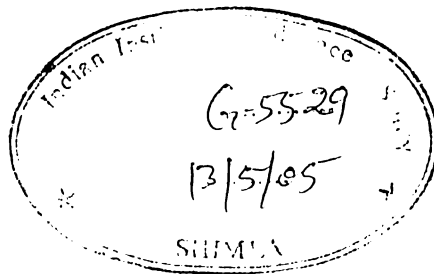
S. Murali has as much involvement with nature and environment as with painting and poetry. He is a member of the scientific committee of the Journal *English Studies*, published from the University of Valladolid, Spain. He is also a Fellow at the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, Teen Murti, New Delhi and an Associate of the Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla.

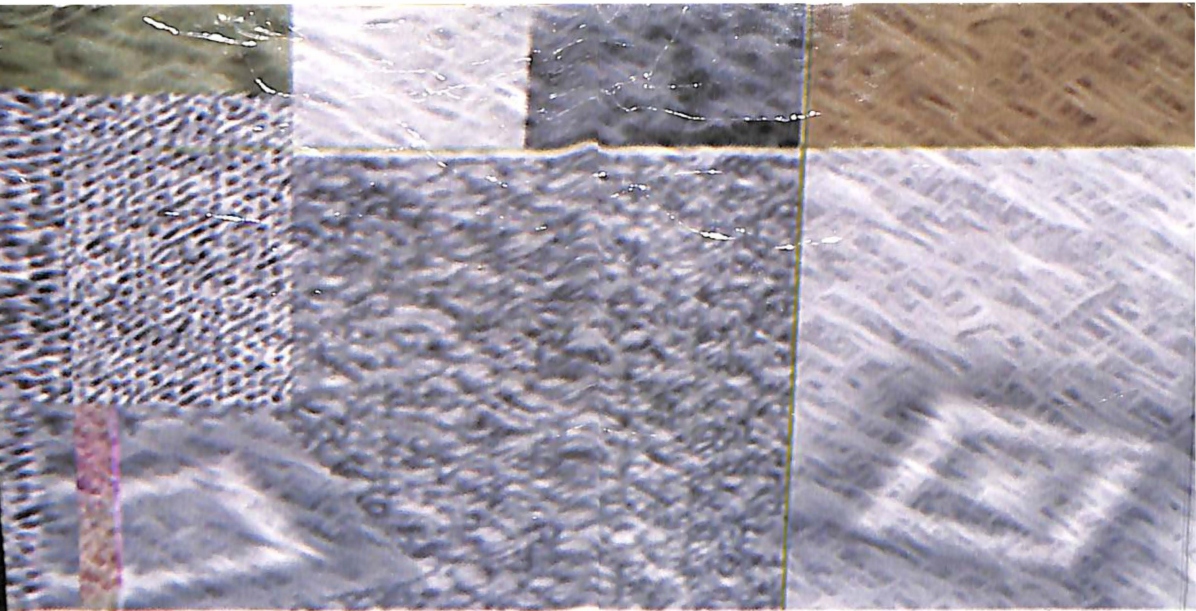
Conversations with Children is Murali's second volume of poems. With this he appears to have fully realized the promise of his previous collection *Night Heron* (1998).

Address:

E-16, Pondicherry University Campus, Pondicherry - 605 014, India.

email : murals@vsnl.com, smurali1234@yahoo.com





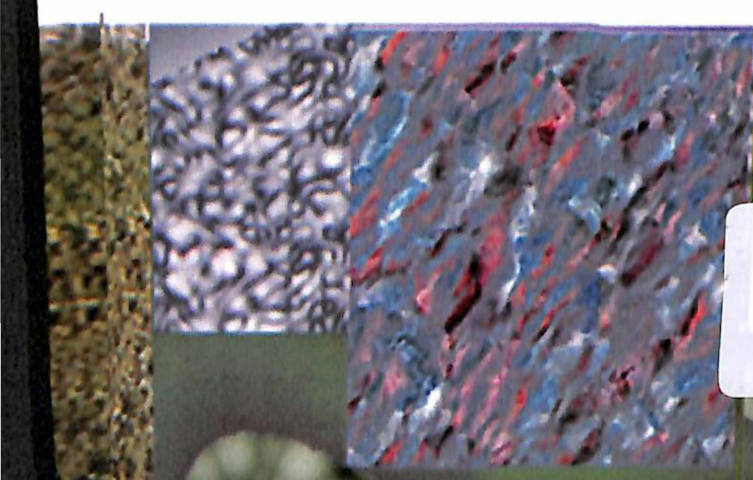
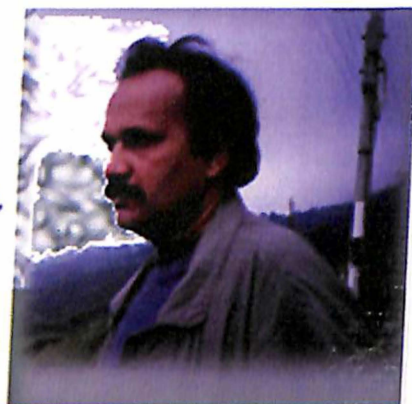
Murali's poems...lead us into the heart of what matters...

JAYANTA MAHAPATRA

Murali's poems abound in insights and imageries of change, transience and the passage of time, lending a subdued pathos to the world of experience he finds himself in...

R.NANDKUMAR

...there's an aesthetic pantheism at the base of these poems...Murali has a questing mind which sees beyond the physical...PREMA NANDAKUMAR



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