

## SUDHARSHANA (SUDHA) COOMARASAMY

### Backlog Brutality\*

My waking hours are spent  
trying to forget the nightmares.  
I see my wife with unshed tears  
carrying our child in the womb,  
holding our children by the hand,  
bidding farewell silently, in the dark.  
I was certain in seeking refuge  
my family will also attain safety soon.  
At hearings I had to recall and relive  
and then be traumatized anew.  
But I bore it all because I longed  
this nightmare of severance to cease.  
Daily, I waited for the letter,  
that would give hope and new life to us.  
Now my neighbour who recently joined my hell  
tells me that my last child is five years old.  
I close my eyes trying to visualize—  
holding my baby on my lap, on my shoulder,  
watching her crawl and take the first step,  
Listening to music of first words.  
But, I cannot give a face to my fantasy,  
and reality reminds me I've never seen—  
the baby that's ours and is now five years old.

All around me I see—  
mothers, fathers, wives, husbands and children,  
waiting to be joined with their families,  
separated and fragmented longing to become whole.  
How can I find solace  
that I'm not the only one in this hell hole.  
That not one but thousands cry in despair  
and that thousands have only exchanged  
one nightmare to another—even worse.  
Had we stayed, death would have brought sweet  
peace;  
but in asylum we've gained pain that'll never cease.

\* In response to the ICCR report submitted to UN Human Rights Commission on Civil Rights and Refugee Claimant Backlog, October 1990.

### On Trial Without Charges

We hid behind bushes,  
laboured with birth pangs inside trenches—  
stretched a meal for husband and children,  
and filled our bellies with water.  
We gathered our family  
under one roof—a tree.  
We witnessed loss of life and property  
and shuddered and suffered daily.

Some decided to brave the seas,  
some the relentless desert lands.  
Separation—the price of survival  
traditions were broken to stay alive.

When at borders, ports and camps  
our hosts surveyed us with doubts and disbelief,  
and sought proof of our pain and loss,  
we suffered and shrunk a little more.

Our journeys are not over yet  
in asylum we are in exile.  
In resettlement we are on trial  
Our charges are not clear to us.

Is it a crime to want to stay alive,  
to raise your family without war and fear.  
Is it a crime to cross borders  
and seek refuge in a neighbour's house?

*Sudharshana Coomarasamy is a Sri Lankan Tamil whose poetry has been published in DIVA, Fireweed and Refugee Update. Since coming to Canada, she has been actively involved with refugee and women's issues.*