

A Tsunami's Tryst with Fisherfolk

Mathews Varkey

It was December
They were in a hurry
to ring down the curtain
on a year.
December 2004, and
twenty-sixth the morning

The day began as usual
for the village of the fisherfolk;
though the morning sun took a while longer
to clean up the December mist.
Men were back from the seas
long before, and their women bustling
to begin their bargain.
The boys ventured out early, playing cricket
and kuttiyum kolum.
And the girls hopped back and forth
on the columns they drew on the sands.
With pebbles in their hands.
While the elders sat outside
watching their children play.
Many more, many more
kept pouring in.

The sea was calm and serene, now.
No clouds gathered.
No satellites beamed to caution
the village of the fisherfolk.
Not a lightning before the thunder.
Though a hush of the wind from the East.
In one swift stroke
did the waves roll back a mile
baring the beauty
of the bottom.
The children rushed in to pick up the gems
that decked the floor bed

where little fish littered alive.
While the elders held them back
dumbstruck.
At this rare show of the blue seas.

The tides were busy then
building up high walls somewhere not far.
And without notice
to the village of the fisherfolk.
Came racking then like a bolt from the blue seas
with a bull-dozer and a roar.
Tossed up lives and homes
in surging waters.
A broken haystack
caught in a windstorm.
In the tussle, for some a chance
on roofs, tree-tops.
But later did the waters
wash up ashore
a mash of floating wreckage
of the dead and the dying, half-naked.

The day drew to a close
once again.
A forsaken day of a year
for the village of the fisherfolk.
By a sleight of the sullen seas
still rummaging through the ruins.
Leaving mass graves for the dead
no mourners for the missing
and a burgeoning baffle for the half-dead.
Tsunami's sundries now squatted
like strange bedfellows
in makeshift shelters.
In borrowed clothes.
Mangled in blinding grief
and desolation.
And to millions, a froth of frozen snapshots
of life that was yesterday.