

## Letter from Eachilampattu

There were no buses so I walked through the weak light that smelt sweetly from the incense of a hundred morning shrines. Warmth touches my cheek. A sea eagle twists and falls on a watery shadow. Under the checkpoint's watchful presence I turn towards the town. Brightly colour-washed tsunami houses proudly line the new road rising under my feet. The engineering activity quickly runs on past fields of broken foundations and abandoned toilet blocks. Work on them stopped under bombardment.

In the tracts of emptied space further on the gravel and graded earth snake round erratic boulders. Beyond the remaining palmyra palms, hills rise occasionally and disappear. The surrounding bushes grow with unwilling tenacity in their own ash. Some remember forests here but they were long since felled. Large Naval camps appear, their wooden stockades are slowly replaced with concrete. Alongside, local huts merge into the detritus on the ground they're built from. A guard stares after a teenage boy.

Walking on I consider the cap of a shell packaging tube. There's beauty in its design, the thick reinforcement ridges meet on its top in a star. Inside, a polystyrene disc protected its contents from accidental impact. Gripping the easy to twist edging's corrugation, I place it by a locked red grill. Beyond which, from a faded blue print, Vishnu gazes out compassionately at the new road's culvert obscuring his shrine. Jasmine flowers brown into translucence under the sagging curtain.

A burst of tarmac, the re-construction of a town is ahead. In my memory it's sketched roughly in scattered rubble, watched over by tensed youths from sun bleached ruins. Now next to freshly painted offices a petrol station stands as if ready to serve. Lost in the distant scrub are villages where no one tends morning shrines. The scorched air is shared between mainly women and children, I wait by the roadside with them under a surviving neem tree's shade.