

MY LAND

A net spread across the shallow waters
the heavy breath of the wind above,
from the middle of the ocean,
fingers pressing down

the unruly hair,
we look up
see the shore,
palmyrah trees, and sporadically,
the tiled roofs.

The waves,
the spray and
the roar of engines
the ninety minutes
how did they end?

Later, an expanse of sand
the rooted
palmyrah trees,
each the height of a man,
on that virgin sand;
the sand itself,
buried mirrors
where the sun settles;
reflections of gold;
beneath that
two thousand years ago
my ancestors walked
this earth;
one footstep
a thousand years;
our roots are deep.

Sleepless, one woman
standing on these shores,
lamenting the stars

falling into the sea;
or another, waiting for
the horizon to split apart,
bring her boat home;
on their bare breasts
trinkets in which, or
in the footprints
now covered by sand
that late evening, with
coconut trees swaying in the wind,
my ancestors
have left a message
for me.

On a hundred thousand shoulders
I stand
this is my land, I shout;
across the seven seas
defying the rising waves
the wind carries
this voice:

My land
My land.

“My Land” by R Cheran
Translated by Chelva Kanaganayakam
From *Wilting Laughter: Three Tamil Poets*
TSAR 2009