

## Defining Moment

**Pauline Chang Ryland**

Like two ships passing on the ocean highway  
One towards a safe harbour, the other a wasteland  
Our van laden with clothes and food to spend Christmas holidays at the family farm  
Their truck carrying their entire home and belongings away from their livelihood, their life  
Our roots going deeper, theirs unwillingly uprooted  
We elated, they distraught; we to celebrate, they to mourn

The houses brightly painted and curtains still drawn, yet looking forlorn  
Once lording over abundant acres of sugarcane and rice  
Holding memories of a lifetime, sacred family conversations, promises and dreams  
Now plucked from their once sturdy foundations  
Relegated to the tray of a dirty truck once laden with cut cane  
Bottomless, landless, neighbourless

Generations of sugarcane farming migrating, not by choice  
Cut off from ancestral farmland a horrendous wrench  
Wounded hearts, downcast faces as forlorn as their uprooted homes  
Broken spirits, dashed hopes, downtrodden  
No more leases, no more land  
Forsaken, forbidden, forgone

Behind them, concrete foundations stripped save a lonely toilet bowl  
No clothes hanging on the line, no bent backs or glint of knife  
No giggles of children, men sipping sweet black tea, women by the *chula*  
No vegetable and fruit stands, no warm smile or eager wave

Only sugarcane and rice waving unattended, unresolved  
Ill-fated, ill-treated, illegitimate

Short changed, lush acres diminished to two vegetable plots and unyielding clay  
From vast acres to little blocks, like shoeboxes arranged haphazardly  
*Jungalee murgi* and *batak* now a luxury  
Quarrelsome neighbours, plenty negativity  
Little sharing, too much stealing, friend becomes enemy  
Dreary, dreadful, dismal