



The Hill Country In Sri Lanka Tamil Literature

Anthony Jeeva

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PREFACE

I understand that these introductory articles written by Mr. Anthony Jeeva, the very popular literary activist of the Hill Country Tamils, are to be translated into English.

As I had mentioned in the research publication on the Culture and Ideology of the Plantation Tamils (Vol. I- in Tamil - 1993) it is a pity that the cultural infrastructure of the Hill Country Tamils, that has sustained them during the period of their Socio-economic oppression has not been studied in depth.

A virile and vibrant culture of the Southern district of Tamil Nadu, went dormant as the people themselves when they were "transplanted " in the cold climate of the Hilly region.

Any rebuilding of their self-identity should pay attention to their cultural traditions.

I am sure **Mr. Anthony Jeeva's** four essays will be a good indicator of that yet unresearched cultural legacy.

09/08/1995

Karthigesu Sivathamby
Professor of Tamil
University of Jaffna

Acknowledgement

We have so far brought out eleven publications of the Hill Country writers in Tamil, through the Hill Country Publishing House - a Sister organisation of the Hill Country Arts and Literary Assembly.

This is the first publication in English. The four articles in this publication first appeared in the VOICE OF THE VOICELESS edited by Rev. Paul Casperz. I thank him for having granted me permission to publish them as a booklet. I also take this opportunity to thank messrs A.V.P. Gomez and A.Theva Rajan, Saral Nadan who translated them into English from Tamil.

It is my pleasure to thank Prof. K Sivathamby who has been one of my guides and mentors in the literary pursuits for having readily written the foreword. I also thank Mr K.S. Sivakumaran who has been pleased to write a note about me.

I will be failing in my duty if I do not make mention of Saral Nadan, S.Muralidharan, H.H.Wickramasinghe, K.P.Sivam, P.Muthulingam, J. Jeskody, Ms. Menaha and Milton A. Perera at this juncture. They have always been a source of encouragement and inspiration to me in my literary pursuits.

I have always considered in my duty to acquaint the non-Tamil readership with the Tamil literary and cultural pursuits in the Hill Country. This is an attempt towards that end.

Antony Jeeva.

GROWTH OF HILL COUNTRY LITERATURE

People who are termed the Hillcountry people are the generations of those who have settled down in the Hillcountry from the third decade of nineteenth century. They brought their culture when they came here. The culture they brought was the old resourceful South Indian culture. The Hillcountry literature has grown on this base.

The actual settlement started with the coming of 16 families in 1824. The output of these people was oral literature.

Folk songs, gypsy songs, story songs, Themmangu songs (a kind of rural song) lullaby songs on the death of a person came under this category of oral unwritten literature. While the folk songs of the other areas depict the life styles and the customs of the people, so does the Hillcountry folk literature depict the ups and downs of the history of these people.

We can observe the following depicted in these folk songs: the difficulties they underwent to reach Kandy, the torture and torment they experienced under the kanganyies (their immediate superior) the sufferings when coffee was introduced the changes that took place when tea plants were planted.

This situation continued up to 1920, After that their feelings and thoughts began to appear in print. During the period when K.Natesa Aiyar was a member of the State Council and the Legislative Council, he worked for the propagation of literary activities among the Hillcountry people.

Natesa Aiyar who had been in the state service in Tanjore and later was editor of a paper had come to Sri Lanka to collect sub-

scriptions for that paper in 1920 he came again and accepted the post of editor of "Thesa Nesan" After that he published a daily by the name of "These Bakthan" Natesa Aiyar who introduced himself as an editor not only devoted himself to the upliftment of the Hillcountry people, but also wrote and spoke on their behalf. The poet Bharathy's songs were sung by his wife Meenatchi Ammal, who had a very sweet Voice. Thus he became the pioneer of the attempts to record and promote Hillcountry Literature.

Even earlier, during the coffee era at Deltota, near Kandy town lived Arulvaki Abdul Cader Pulavar. He was a pioneer of Hillcountry poetry. Abdul Cader Pullavar who was called Vidya Deepam-Torch of Knowledge-was a shining figure among the Hillcountry people. He participated in customary gatherings poets corners public feasts and sung items such as Venbas, Nadodi Sindhu (rural folk songs). He is the author of more than thirty publications. He was born in Deltota in 1866.

After 1920 poems and orally recited songs were printed on small sheets of paper and distributed among the workers in the Hillcountry

K.Natesa Aiyar along with his wife would go to the estates and make speeches to the crowd that would make them realise their situation. His wife would sing Bharathy's songs and her own compositions in her very sweet voice. They printed them in small publications and distributed them among the workers.

Clearing of the jungles is by the Indians - you
study and speak because of the Indians - you
Developed the country with the help of Indians- you
Now speak ungratefully.....say on.

Such songs were published in a book published by Meenachi

Ammayar under the title " The Situation of the Indians in Ceylon" and was distributed among the workers in 1940. Further the writings and speeches of Natesa Aiyar boosted the feelings of the people. As a result Nawalapitiya S.S.R. Periyampillai S.Govindasamy Thevar, Kasi Renganathan, Thondan editor S.S Nathan Badulla, V.Gnanapandithan, P.R.Periyasamy and others printed ordinary and simple songs and sung and distributed them among the workers.

Poet Sithabaranatha Pavalar wrote regularly in the Virakesari. In 1934 under the pseudonym "Baudayan" he wrote the life story of the Buddha in poetic form There were two poets who were inspired by the Bharatha king of poets Rabindranath Tagore and the poetess, Nightingale Sarojini Devi. One is C.V. Velupillai and the other is K. Ganesh

C.V Veluppillai who could express himself both in English and Tamil highlighted the difficulties and sufferings of the people of the Hillcountry to the world. It is his book of poems 'In a Ceylon Tea Garden' which did his praiseworthy service another poet of the Hillcountry, Sakthi Balaiah, translated in into Tamil under the title 'Theyilai Thotatthile'.

In 1963 when the first edition of the anthology of poems was published poems of seventy poets from ten countries, namely Sri Lanka, India, China, Congo, Indonesia, Korea, Sudan, Tanganyika, Russia and Vietnam were included C.V.Veluppillai of Indian origin was the only Tamil poet included in the anthlogy

The novel 'Ini Padamatten' is prescribed as the text book in Madura American College South India for the Master of Arts of Degree.

K.Ganesh who is still with us, has taken translation as his speciality. He published a literary magazine 'Bharathy' in 1946 with the help of K. Ramanathan. He has translated the works of Indian

authors such as Premchand K. Abbas and Mulkraj Anand. He has published books translating the stories of Ho Chi Min and Luxun.

Only after 1956 education became the property of all. At the same time the era of Manikkodi came into being in Tamilnadu. Its influence was felt in the Hillcountry. The propaganda literature of Periyar's Dravida Kazhagam and Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, Poems of Bharathithasan, his drama books began to flow into the hill country. The influence of these did not fail to bring about a change and renaissance among the young generation.

Following this, in the sixties, there was a tremendous growth in hillcountry literature.

A fresh and novel boost was felt. Many new individuals began to take great interest in literary activities. The twins of Hatton Highlands College, Ira Sivalingam and Thiruchenduran were their boosters. With the leadership of these two a new generation stepped into the literary field. For that 'Malaimurasu' called the Hillcountry "Manikkodi" was of greater help.

During this period, in a competition conducted by "Kalki" printed overseas, Thiruchenduran's Urimai Enge' won a prize. This prize winning short story made many eyes turn towards the Hillcountry. This gave great impetus to Hillcountry literature. The Hillcountry movements magazines and national papers gave momentum and enthusiasm to Hillcountry literature.

Today in the field of short stories we can point out the names of N.S.M Ramaiah, Theliwatta Joseph, Saral Nadan, Malaranban, M.Sivaligam, Mathalai Somu, Mathalai Vadivelan, Mozhivarathan, Nuwara Eliya Shanmuganathan and Malligai C.Kumar.

Likewise in the field of poetry, with the publication of an anthology of poems "Kurunji Poo" by Elzhakkumar, many with some

poetic talent came into field. In the nineteen seventies many stepped into this field. We could mention specially Aru Sivananthan. Though he had to go to India under the Sirima-sastri Agreement his books were published under the title 'Vannach Siragu'.

After the eighties we can point out Muralidaran, a poet, who is a Science graduate Muralidaran's 'Koodaikkul Thesam' and Thiyaga Yanthirangal anthology have been published.

We can mention the following who are continuing to write in the poetic field: Kurunji Thennavan, M.C.M Zubair, Thamihovian, Pannamathu Kavirayar, M.C.M. Haleemdeen, Malaithambi, Sarana Kaiyoom, K.P.Lingadasan S.P.Thangavel, A.P.V.Gomez, M.Ramachandran, Pussellawa Ismalika, Welimada Refeek, Ragala Panneer. The list goes on. Here I have mentioned only those who are active at present.

Also in the field of writing novels too there have been some achievements. There are 'Thoorathu Pachchai' by Kokilam Suppiah and 'Inee Padamatten' by Veluppillai. These could be taken as recorded documents of the Hillcountry people. A Few who were not born in the Hillcountry but made it their homeland also have written some novels based on life in the Hillcountry. We could spot out two. They are T.Gnanasekaram's 'Kuruthy Malai' and K.Sathasivam's 'Mootathinulle'. Futher, Nandi's 'Malaikozhundu' Benedictt Balah's 'Sonthakkaran' depict the life of the Hillcountry people.

A special mention should be made here that Prof. Kailasapathy has stated that Hillcountry has infused new blood to Sri lankan Tamil Literature.

(Translated by A.P.V. Gomez)

'Voice of the Voiceless'

April 1995.

TRADITIONAL ART FORMS OF HILL COUNTRYTAMILS

*(The substance of a speech delivered by Anthony Jeeva)
at the Kandy Regional Studies Festival on 20-07-1993
presided over by Prof. S.Thillainathan)*

Sri Lanka and India are close neighbours with very intimate relationships consequently, Indian influence on Sri Lankan political, economic, artistic and literary spheres has been unavoidable. This influence is discernible in the Sri Lankan Sinhala, Tamil and English writings. This article seeks to ascertain the extent of such influence on the literature of the Hill-country Tamils.

Up to the period when India and Sri Lanka remained British Colonies, this influence was very great. Tamils live in great concentration in Jaffna which lies in the North of Sri Lanka. Tamils who live in great concentration in Tamil Nadu in India are close neighbours of Sri Lanka separated only by a small stretch of sea *That is why, until some decades ago, considering India as the motherland was common in Sri Lanka.*

People like Ananda Coomaraswamy stressed the need for extensive cooperation and collaboration with India rather than with European countries. In his presidential address at the Annual General Meeting of the Social Reform League held in 1907 he emphasized this.

Tamils from Southern India were brought and settled in the central hilly areas of Sri Lanka in large numbers. They are called hill-country Tamils or Kurinji Tamils even today. Literature concerning them and literature created by writers from among them are generally called "Hill-Country Literature" This literature is also Sri Lankan literature.

These people who are accustomed to life in India began to have new experiences according to their changed life in Sri Lanka. They

did not cut off their Indian contacts completely. Instead, they made use of such contacts in a manner beneficial to their new area of domicile. This is their first contribution.

The Tamils of recent Indian origin living in the hill-country have lived in Sri Lanka for nearly 200 years. Their settlement in Sri Lanka started with the arrival of sixteen families in 1824. Their first literary expression was in oral form.

When the Tamils of recent Indian origin came here, they brought with them their traditional art forms. Before the tea era, even in the coffee era, they sang folk songs like " Kummiyo Kummi Koppikkadduk Kummi" Let us first examine the arts that struck roots amongst them Kummi, Koladdam, Oyiladdam, Karakam, Kavadi, Ponnar Sankar, Aruchunan Thapasu, Kaman Koottu, Thappu Isai are some among the many.

Thappu is one of the traditional hide instruments of the hill-country Tamils. It can be played in about 18 different ways. Each produces a musically accentuated different sound. Each has its own special significance - such as for mourning heralding, parade (for work assignments) weddings puberty ceremony death.

Thappu is also used for Kavadi Karakam, Temple festivals and other occasions. It is also used for dramas like Kaman Koottu. Aruchunan Thapasu and Ponnar Sankar. Another important hide instrument is the Udukku, which is played for Kavadi and Karakam. It is also used for witchcraft ceremonies.

There are other traditional instruments still in use such as Urumi. Thamoora, Senchanank- kaddia, Conch, Thandai. Kummi, Koladdam, and Kavadi are still popular. They are traditional arts which have become inseparably entwined with the life of the hill- country Tamils.

Women perform and enjoy the Kummi dance at temple festivals, home functions and social functions. A song sung during Kummi dance runs thus-

*Thanna-na-na- thinam Thanna- na-ne- Thana
Thanna- na- na- thinam Thanna- ne*

*Thanna- na- na- ne Enru Than
Sollung- kalen.*

Unga Na vukku sarkkarai nan Tharen

*Thanna- na- thinam Than- na- ne
Thenkai Udaikkave Thanni*

*Theppang- kulam Ellam Thatththalikka
Marudha Meenadchy Mayavan Thankachchi
Eppa Varuvalaum Theppam Parakka
Marudha Vandhalum Therodatham.*

*Andha!
Marudha Meenadchy --- Mayavan Thankachchy
Vandhu Vadam Thoddal Therodumam.*

*Thannan- na- thinam Than- na- ne
Sinnak- kulathathile Neeradhi-Andha
Sinkara Thoppile Veddai Adi
Veeddukku Varavam Velli- ratham- eir
Veerak- Kanai kondi Veesungadi
Thannan- na Thinam Than- na- ne.*

When is the Goddess Madurai Meenachchi, the younger sister of God Mayavan (Vishnu) coming to see the boat ride on the lake. The chariot of the God Madurai will move only when the Goddess Madurai Meenachchi touches the rope. The rest is a musical refrain.

Among the dramas popular among us are the Kaman Koottu, Ponnar Sankar and Aruchunan Thapasu. The most popular one is Kaman Koottu. It is annually staged on an elaborate scale. It is staged in estates with a sense of religious devotion.

Of the trihaddional art forms of the hill-country Tamils, it is the oral songs which have been with us always. They are also called folk songs or folk literature.

Most of these songs have still not seen print. it is throught these songs that one has to reconstruct the history of the life and life-styles of these people. Some of them have been classified according to the contexts in which they are used.

While oral literature in other regions of Sri Lanka portrays the social life costumes and practices of the people of that region, the oral literature of the hill country Tamils goes one step further and depicts aspects of their history and struggles. This is another contribution of these people to Sri Lankan literature.

In this orel literature their woes and sorrows joy and jubilation aspirations and struggles can be discerned. This oral literature which ranges from lullabies and love songs to funeral-songs (oppari) and kummi has its roots in the rural culture of Tamil Nadu.

Let us hear some of them.

Vadai Adikkuthadi
Vada- katthu Veethusady
Sennal Manakkuthadi
Sernthu Vantha Kappalile

In this song the tiresome and grief- laden voyage by ship from India is depicted.

Urana Urilanthan
Oththapanai Thoppilanthan
Perana Kandiyle
Petheha Thaya Na-maranthen.

Here, the worker laments his departure from his home and home environs. More moving is his grief at his separation from his mother.

Konak Kona Malai Eri
Koppip- palam Parikkayaile
Oru palam Thappichchinnu
Othachchsanaia Sinnadorai

In this song of the coffee period, how an Assistant Superintendent kicked a labourer because one coffee berry fell to the ground in the act of plucking while climbing the winding mountains is portrayed.

Kandakkaiya Roddu Mele
Podiyan Palamedukka
Pollappu Nernthathaiya

In this song, also of the coffee period, the sorrow of how a young boy met with a tragedy while plucking coffee berries is depicted.

In the estate, the kanganies (labour overseers) are considered heartless beings to who many atrocities are attributed. Here is one such song.

Enni Kuli Veddi
Iduppodinchi Nikkayile
Veddu Veddu Enkirane
Velayththa Kenkany

The kangany sits on the labourer and forces him to cut trenches whereas the labourer complains that his hip is broken.

Anthana Thoddamunu
Asaiya Than- iruten
Ora Moodda Thookkach- challi
Othakkirare Kandakkaiya

Here the labourer laments that though he came happily to work on the estate, he was being forced and kicked by the kangany to carry fertilizer bags.

Many writers have projected the sad life of these people through this oral literature. There are love songs also. Let us see a few.

Kooda Mele Kooda Vachci
Kolunthu edukku Pora pulla
Kooda Erakki Vachchu
Kuluntha Varththai Sollip Podi

'Oh, you young damsel! going with basket after basket to pluck tea, why can't you lay them down for a while and speak some warm words of love to me?

But she replies thus:

En purushan Kangany
En Kolunthan Kavvaththu
Elaya Kolunthanume
Storu Mel Kanakku.

She tells his that she is married to the kanagany.
The girl who listened to this, a cousin of the boy, says

Kalluruka kadaluruka
Kandar Mananamuruka

*Nanum Sadankaki
Nappaththoru Nalachchu
Eninnu Kekkalye
Eriddu Mukam Parakkalye*

The girl says that she has come of age and that nobody is caring for her and hints at the boy to make love to her.

Likewise, there are children's songs also. Let us see one of them. This refers to a travel by train to Nanu Oya and Hatton although these innocents refer to it as a ship through ignorance.

*Sikku Pukku
Neelagiri Thoppi Thoddam
Nanga Vantha
Kappalile Michcha Kooddam.*

Neelagiri, here, refers to Nanu Oya. Thoppi Thoddam refers to Hatton. It is interesting to note that these people, unfamiliar with local names at the beginning, gave place names with which they were familiar in India. Neelagiri (Tamil) refers to Nilagris in Coimbatore District in Tamil Nadu. Thoppi Thoddam is another area in Tamil Nadu. Similar instances are in abundance.

It is our duty to preserve this oral literature without allowing it to get lost. We have modern facilities. These have to be recorded on audio cassettes and preserved. this oral literature of the hill- country is also a valuable documentary of their history.

Even those who researched the life and life- styles of the Black Americans are accused of neglecting their oral and rural literature though they have dwelt on their slavery and history. We should not make the same mistake. We must preserve these traditional art forms.

(Translated by A. Devarajan)
VOICE OF THE VOICELESS
JANUARY 1994

MADAM MEENATCHI AMMAL

Meenatchi Ammal is one of the famous women of Sri Lanka. She is the wife of K. Nadesaiyar who was the pioneer in promoting Trade Union activities in the Up country and prominent journalist. Mrs. Meenatchi Ammal joined hands with him in these activities, and also in journalism. This she did for the upliftment and the progress of the down trodden womenfolk of the Upcountry.

Meenatchi Ammal came to Sri Lanka along with her husband in the year 1920. She sacrificed herself in the avowed services of her husband. Let's quote what Saral Nadan has to say about her in his famous book 'Desabakthan Nadesaiyar' It goes thus- "The force behind Nadesaiyar was his wife Meenatchi Ammal. She trudged from estate to estate, hand in hand with her husband in his tireless services, and activities. She could adjust herself to his quick temper and restrict or control his impudency without overflowing as a wild river. She also acted as a power that could shatter all the restrictions and obstructions that had to be faced very often. The tow, together contacted the ordinary people in every nook and corner of the highlands, the boundaries of the Estae, bus stands and wherever people gathered."

When Nadesaiyar published and distributed the songs of Greade Poet Barathy, Meenatchi Ammal would sing those songs in her captivating sweet voice. Only after her singing would Aiyar deliver his speech.

Meenatchi Ammal was not only good at singing but likewise

good at composing songs. an anthology of songs written by her has been published entitled "The plight of the Indians' life in Sri Lanka."

The paper published by Nadesaiyer, namely "Desa Bakthan" became a daily in 1929. Though Nadesaiyer was the chief Editor, Meenatchi Ammal had to be responsible to print and publish it because Nadesaiyer went to the outstations very often on Trade Union matters. The daily was published with the following note.- Printed and published by Mrs. K.N.Meenatchi Ammal for the Chief Editor and owner K.Nadesaiyar.

Meenatchi Ammal wrote abundantly in the Desa Bakthan when Iyer was not available. She herself wrote the Editorial. she was in charge of the 'Women's Page' On 25.01.1929 she wrote an article entitled 'Women and Newspapers' in the women's page of the Desa Bakthan.

A mass meeting was held to protest against the injustices caused to the Indians, on 27.05.1939 at the Bambalapitiya Templeyard. At the meeting along with K. Nadesaiyer, G.G.Ponnambalam, A.Aziz, and I.X.Periera, Meenatchi Ammal took part and spoke vehemently on the future of the Indians. A news item was published in the Veerakesari regarding this the following day.

Nadesa Iyar and his wife Meenatchi Ammal joined hands with the leftist leaders to voice their protest against the government which wanted to deport the Englishman Brisgirdel who supported the cause of the Estate labourers. Mrs.Meenatchi Ammal

also participated and spoke at the meeting, held at the Galle Face Green in favour of Brisgirdle. Sama Samaja party had organised the meeting.

Meenatchi Ammal was very much concerned about the sorry plight of the Indians. " The state of the Indians Living in Sri Lanka is detiriorating form day to day. The situation has arisen when all the Indians Living in Sri Lanka, to get together and clamour and fight fiercely for the rights. If the propaganda could be done in the form of songs it would bring about greater results. This is why I have come here to tell the plight of the Indians in songs. I hope these songs would arouse the Indians from their slumber and keep them awake, to the situation" She comments so in the book: The life of Indians in Sri Lanka' This book of songs was published in 1940.

Meenatchi Ammal who was very much attracted by the songs of immortal Barathy lived as a "revolutionary woman" whom Barathy dreamt of.

Meenatchi Ammal was not only good at writing and oratory but putting into action whatever she thought was sincere and coorect. She taught composing of type to the females and had them as compositors of Desa Bakthen.

It is the bounden duty of all the right thinking people to well remember Meenatchi Ammal every year on the 8th of March- on the International Women's Day for she was a pioneer and guide of the womenfolk of the down trodden womenfolk.

Translated by

A.P.V.Gomez.

NATESA IYER- A PROPHET FOR THE PLANTATIONS

Natesa Iyer is the name of an individual that needs to be remembered in the present context of our country with the highlighting of the differences in race, caste and creed. The history of 155 years of the plantation era has many heart burning stories to offer, and often the stories are tragedies. Here it is a different story - the Story of Natesa Iyer, a man who was primarily responsible for the awakening among the plantation workers.

He was an Indian Brahmin by birth from Tanjore. Tanjore is even now a prosperous area in South India. It was from there that Sri Wickrema Rajasinghe, the last King of Kandy, hailed. Thus it can be seen that not all who immigrated to Sri Lanka from South India in the 19th century did so only for employment in the plantations, as many people seem to think.

Natesa Iyer's life in Sri Lanka may be divided into two parts. He was a member of the Legislative Council from 1925 to 1930. Later from 1937 to 1947 he was a member of the State Council.

He had a flair for journalism. He was a Trade Unionist. His association with A.E Goonesinha in mobilizing the urban workers and the estate workers has no parallel in the history of Sri Lanka. Finally, when Goonesinha took up an anti-Tamil stand, Natesa Iyer's critical attack on him was superbly done in his writing.

He was a lonely fighter for the plantation workers against the whole array of English planters. His was a call to the plantation workers to cease their slumber. He stood for their full emancipation. He felt that this could only be achieved by their joining

hands with the Sinhalese. This eroded at a latter stage his support among the Indian Tamils. But Natesa Iyer had the courage of his convictions.

When the early estate population was of Indians alone, it was Natesa Iyer who said that the Sinhalese villagers should also be encouraged to be residential workers on estates. He believed that this arrangement would give the required moral strength for the immigrant workers to fight injustice. He even advocated this in the State Council on 26 March 1941 in the following manner. a few days back I had some trouble with an employer. He said, "Mr Iyer, you are playing into the hands of the Sinhalese." I said, "You have given us over to the Sinhalese. you have given us over to them so why do you say that we are playing into the hands of the Sinhalese?" His reply was, "I love the Indian, because he is docile". (Hansard, 26 March 1941, p 690). This is what Natesa Iyer hated. He did not want the workers to be servile.

He suggested that 25 percent of estate labour should be Sinhalese. He believed that this would help to change the docility of the Indians. He cited an incident in the State Council where a knife was used on an European planter because he had not treated the villagers properly. And he went on to say, 'I am for seeing that at least 25 percent of the estate labour is Sinhalese in order to see that Indian labourers at least behave like men, instead of behaving like slaves' (ibid.,) p.691).

He also proclaimed that up to then the worker's voice was a cry in the wilderness. In order to improve the standards of the immigrants on the estates and to solve the unemployment problem, he recommended that "at least 15 to 20 per cent of immigrant labour (be) repatriated to India"" (ibid.) He also recommended inducements and free passage to would-be repatriates.

'Therefore if the labourers were offered some attractive terms for repatriation, the 20 per cent I referred to will naturally go back, and the balance can be treated as nationals of this country and thus (we can) have the matter settled' (ibid.)

Sir John Kotalawela Mr S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike, Mrs Sirimavo Bandaranaike and Mr J.R. Jayawardena started thinking in the same way. But after a lapse of how many years? If the problem could have been viewed in the correct perspective in 1941, we could have seen a different, better and better integrated Sri Lanka today.

Politics should not heed differences of caste, creed and race, The Sri Lankan politician should talk Sri lankan politics. Natesa Iyer did this 50 years ago and why cannot we do that now?

Natesa Iyer was a fierce anti- imperialist. That is why he had the courage to start the first Trade Union for the estate workers in 1933. Today the strength of the Unions gives them bargaining power and the Unions have provided employment for many for Natesa Iyer the task was not easy. The British Raj in Ceylon was at its height and it was dangerous to oppose it. Natesa Iyer dared. He was throughout his life an agitator.

Translated by
Saralnadan

TEA PLUCKERS

*My bronze bodied men
Noose the morning light;
From dell to dale
From uplands and inclines
Echoes rise and fall
To the rhythm of pickaxe
Mammoty, fork and crowbar
Forkers and pruners
Ferners and sprayers
Each skilled in the task;
They enter the field.
Disturbed beehives their hearts
Their hands honey combs
Drip warm with the sweat,
Eight hours in a day
Seven times in a week;
Thus their life blood flows
To fashion this land
A paradise for some.*

- C. V. Velupillai

*in Afro-Asian Anthology, Vol. I, Part I, May 1963. Kindly
sent to **Voice of the Voiceless** by Anthony Jeewa of the
Hill Country Arts & Literary Assembly.*

*Voice of the Voiceless
July 1995.*

Tamil playwright

By Ehsan Sourjah

Anthony Jeeva, who represents Sri Lanka at the Art and Literary Conference of Tamil Nadu next month, has the distinction of having one of his plays banned because it offended the taste of the Censors.

The play, "Veena Alaharade" he says was a study of feminine infidelity which was inspired by a reading of "Lady Chatterley's Lover."

The 32-year-old playwright, who is a familiar figure in Tamil literary circles, will read his paper on "Tamil Theatre in Sri Lanka." Anthony Jeeva says his paper will stress that the first Tamil play, as we know it, was written in Sri Lanka by the poet Pullavar Mutucumaraswamy in the 19th century. Till then, he says, there were only the folk play and street dramas.

Anthony Jeeva has about ten plays to his credit. "Akkini Pookal" a play he wrote in 1972, won the second prize at the Central Bank Tamil Literary Association Drama Festival held recently. The play portrays the class struggle and is said to



be the first of its kind on the Tamil stage.

Among his other plays that are well known to Tamil audiences are: "Mullil Roja", "Paravaigal" and "Kavidha". The last-named has only three characters and is unusual in the Tamil theatre.

Jeeva who was born and grew up in Colombo, speaks Sinhala fluently. It was the Sinhala theatre that inspired him to take to playwriting in Tamil. Dayananda Gunawardena's 'Nari Bena' and Henry Jayasena's 'Hunuwataya Katawa,' he says, were the main influences.

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The Editor of **Kuntrin Kural**, a quality literary magazine in Tamil, published with accent on the Hill Country lifestyle, **Anthony Jeeva**, is also a wellknown columnist / journalist, writer and a dramatist. His innumerable articles on the Hill Country Tamil Literature had been source material for many serious studies by others.

Anthony Jeeva had been a recipient of many state awards for his plays, **Alaihal** and **Aararo Aarivaro**. His other play **Akkini Pookal** based on the problems faced by the working class people had been staged more than 12 times.

He is also one of the pioneer dramatists in this country among the Tamil - speaking artistes, to have introduced the Street Theatre.

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