

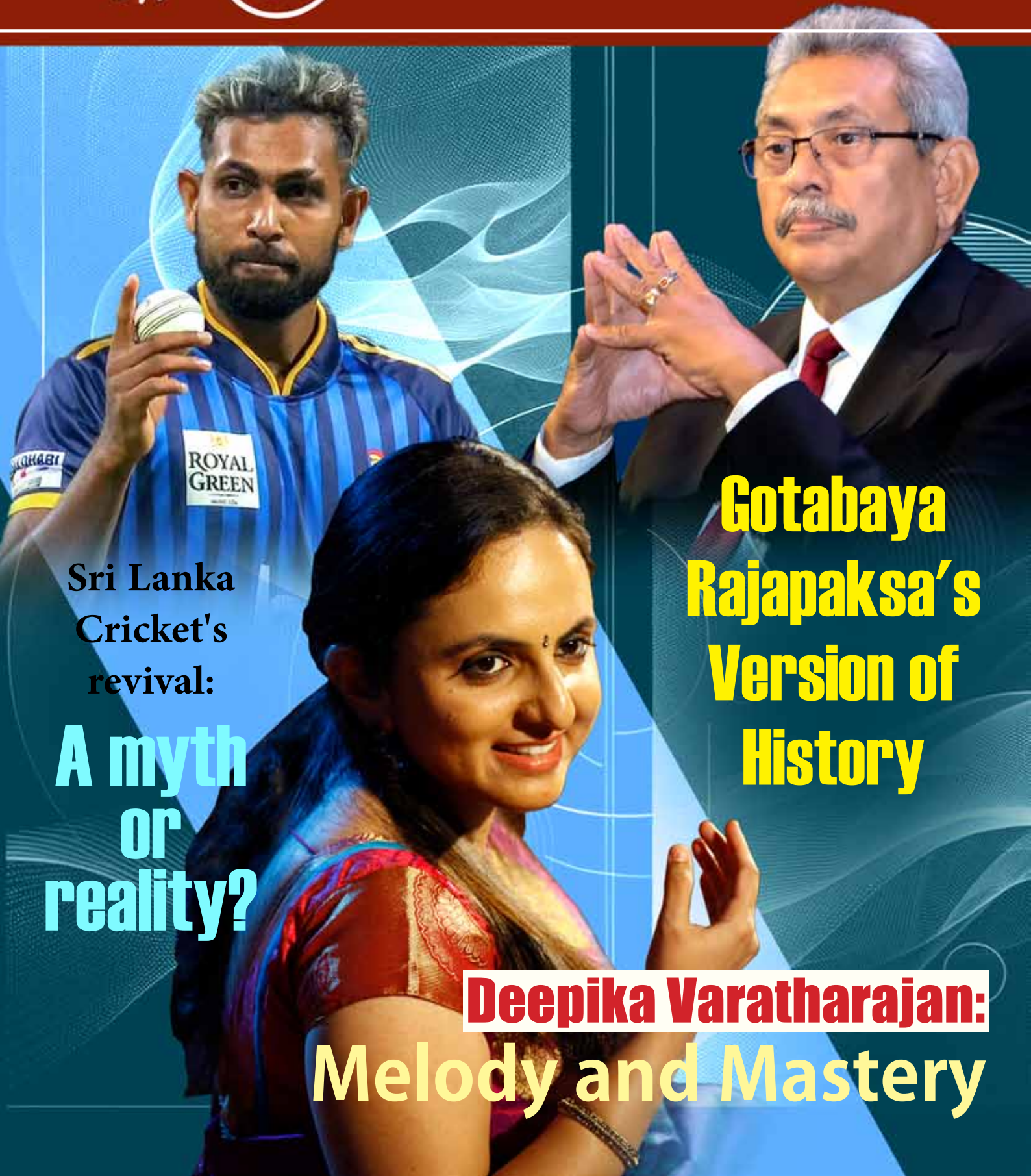
FORTNIGHTLY EDITION  
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# Jaffna monitor

March 15, 2024

UNAFRAID AND UNBOWED



Sri Lanka  
Cricket's  
revival:

**A myth  
or  
reality?**

**Gotabaya  
Rajapaksa's  
Version of  
History**

**Deepika Varatharajan:**  
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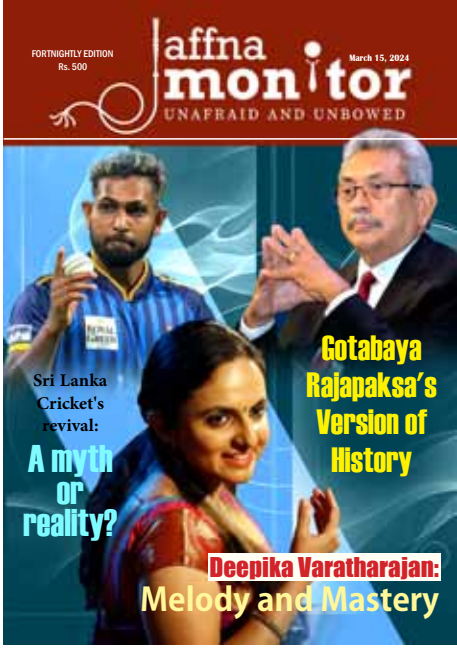
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# Exploring New Worlds: Insights, Diversity, and Conversations

Greetings,

We're delighted to share that the latest issue of the Jaffna Monitor has created quite a stir! The overwhelming influx of emails and calls from our global readership has been both astounding and uplifting. We extend our sincere gratitude to each of you for your enthusiastic reception of our work.

This edition heralds the beginning of an exciting new series offering an intimate glimpse into the lives of distinguished individuals from India and beyond. Our inaugural feature celebrates the incredible talent of Deepika Varadarajan, an accomplished classical singer versed in both Carnatic and Hindustani styles. Her story transcends mere musical skill, unfolding as an evocative narrative of passion, relentless determination, and artistic growth, all interwoven with the vibrant threads of India's profound musical heritage.

Transitioning to a narrative that is both captivating and thought-provoking, we introduce an insightful feature by J. Kumar Babu, an ex-leader of the LTTE. This article, diligently documented by our reporter from Babu's personal account, sheds light on a rarely explored facet of our collective history, inviting thoughtful engagement and deeper understanding.

In sports, we feature an in-depth analysis by the esteemed Dr Aravinthan Arunthavanathan, our expert cricket analyst, who examines the much-talked-about resurgence of Sri Lanka Cricket. Is this revival a mere fabrication, or is it a reality taking shape in real time? Dr. Aravinthan's thorough and perceptive examination takes us through this journey.

A bold critique in this issue dissects 'The Conspiracy to Oust Me from the Presidency,' the controversial memoir by Sri Lanka's ex-president, Gotabaya Rajapaksa. Offering a window into the island's recent political turmoil, our correspondent challenges you to read between the lines, to question and seek the truth behind the political façade.

Join us as we embark on this captivating journey through a mosaic of stories, each enhancing our collective understanding and connecting us in deeper ways. Your unwavering support and readership fuel our mission, and we can't wait to share these enriching experiences with you.

Warm regards,

கணியன் பூங்குன்றன்  
**Kaniyan Pungundran**  
Editor- Jaffna Monitor

# Partial Homecoming :

## Jaffna Land Released, Thousands of Acres Await Return



By:  
**Our Reporter**

Approximately 67 acres of land in the Valikamam North area of Jaffna, which had been designated as a high-security military zone for the past 33 years, were recently returned to their rightful owners. This includes about 20.3 acres in Kangkesanthurai South, within Grama Sevaka Division 235. Similarly, around 23 acres in Varuthalaivilan (Grama Sevaka Division 241) and approximately 24 acres in Mayiliddy South (Thenmayilai),

within Grama Sevaka Division 240, have also been released.

Many people visited their ancestral lands with great interest. Some were seen tearfully rejoicing. An older woman moved to tears, told the Jaffna Monitor that after 33 years, she could finally see her house where she was born and raised and where she gave birth to her children. Another elderly man conveyed to us at the Jaffna Monitor that it seemed like a divine



miracle to him to finally see his ancestral home. He shared with the Jaffna Monitor that, with the help of his sons living abroad, he plans to renovate the house and live in his ancestral home. However, the house he referred to had only a few pillars and walls; the roof and other structural parts that constitute a house were not there, having been destroyed.

Another notable feature is a small Hindu temple under a tree constructed and maintained by the Sri Lankan army. This makeshift temple houses Hindu deities such as Ganesha and Shivalinga. Its presence starkly contrasts the Buddhist temples and statues that the military usually maintains in high-security zones.

Locals observed that a few houses, formerly used as an army camp and as residences for army commanders, have been well-maintained. This is in stark contrast to other houses in the area, which are in a state of disrepair.

In Jaffna alone, thousands of acres of land have been declared part of a high-security zone and are retained by the Sri Lankan army. This situation continues to have a significant impact on the local Tamil population, many of whom are either displaced or struggling to reclaim their ancestral lands. Although the Sri Lankan Army has released some of the land it occupied during the conflict, it still maintains control over other portions within the high-security zone.



# From Ousted President to Author: Gotabaya Rajapaksa's Version of History



By:

**Our Special Correspondent**

In 'The Conspiracy to Oust Me from the Presidency,' the only book by former President Gotabaya Rajapaksa, a narrative unfolds that many believe is out of touch with the stark realities of his tenure. More an assertive indictment than a modest memoir, this work directly targets the Aragalaya movement and his adversaries.

Notably, during the height of his presidency amidst the economic crisis, Rajapaksa's opposition comprised a significant portion of the Sri Lankan populace. He describes this opposition as a covert operation against his rule. While providing a gripping read, the book should be recognized as representing merely one viewpoint on a tumultuous period in Sri Lanka's history.

Embracing the notion that every perspective holds value, this book offers an alternative angle worth exploring. Nonetheless, the assertion that Rajapaksa himself penned the book invites questions about his venture into authorship.

The Aragalaya, or the mass struggle, manifested as a powerful wave of public dissent, mobilizing hundreds of thousands in the streets. Their demands extended beyond Rajapaksa's removal, calling for a fundamental change in the governing system. Contrasting with Rajapaksa's portrayal, many observers, this writer





included, see the uprising as an authentic grassroots movement, not a ploy manipulated from abroad. While it undoubtedly received support and was shaped by local political agendas, particularly from parties like the JVP, Rajapaksa's characterization of it as an 'internationally sponsored regime change' seems to be a significant exaggeration.

Given his governance, plagued by questionable economic choices, one must ponder how the electorate, which had granted him a historic victory of 6,924,255 votes just two years and nine months before, could have so decidedly turned against him.

From Rajapaksa's vantage point, the military's restraint during this era emerges as a confounding element of the supposed conspiracy. He openly questions why figures such as Defence Secretary Kamal Gunaratne and Chief of Defence Staff Shavendra Silva did not adopt a more aggressive approach

against the protesters. This allegation hints at a realignment within the army, moving away from the once-dominant Defence Secretary, renowned for leading the forces to triumph over the LTTE.

Gotabaya Rajapaksa's political narrative was shaped by the 2012 publication of 'Gota's War—The Crushing of Tamil Tiger Terrorism in Sri Lanka,' authored by his associate and journalist C.A. Chandraprema. Detailing his pivotal role in the conflict, the book credits him with the defeat of the Tamil Tigers, a release that interestingly came just before the elections where Mahinda Rajapaksa faced defeat.

Sri Lanka's political observers now see his latest book as a bid to rekindle the Rajapaksas' waning political fortunes. Yet, current trends suggest that they should tread carefully to avoid becoming fodder for ridicule, a fate that has recently befallen the family in social media circles.

# Anton Master Speaks:

## Former Military Office Chief of LTTE Shares His Untold Story with 'Jaffna Monitor'



### Part- 5



BY:

**Kaniyan Pungundran**

கணியன் பூங்குன்றன்

KT Sivakumar, also known as Anton Master, is a prominent early member of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and a close associate of leader Prabhakaran. He significantly contributed to the LTTE as a member of its Central Committee and as the founder and head of the Military Office (MO), enhancing the group's military effectiveness. Known for his reticence in media interactions, Sivakumar prefers 'dialogues' over interviews. The following is a part of a series of dialogues I had with him, providing rare insights, which will be featured in the forthcoming issues.

**As a prominent member of the LTTE who oversaw the organization's Military Office (MO), what prompted your decision to leave the LTTE? Could you share the reasons behind this significant move?**

You need to understand one fundamental aspect: we initiated the liberation struggle in response to the Sri Lankan Tamil people's treatment as second-class citizens by Sinhala chauvinist governments. The LTTE was not established, nor did its fighters sacrifice their lives to combat the Indian government or its army. I firmly believed that antagonizing India was not a viable strategy, and I also understood that Sri Lankan Tamils could not achieve their goals by making India an enemy. Unfortunately, this understanding was something Prabhakaran lacked.

When Prabhakaran himself lacked this clarity, it was unrealistic to expect his close aides, who always concurred with him and acted as 'yes-men,' to possess it. Opposing India would have left the LTTE without a safe haven, so I



*Anton Master (L) with Prabhakaran*

firmly believed that we should not antagonize India.

During clashes between the LTTE and the Indian Army in Jaffna, we even transported injured LTTE fighters to India for treatment with the blessing of the Indian government. This demonstrated the Indian government's remarkable tolerance at the time. While fighting was going on between LTTE and Indian forces in Sri Lanka, I met actor Sivaji Ganesan, who led the political party 'Thamizhaga Munnetra Munnani'. I asked him to release a press statement in favor of the LTTE. He responded with a sad smile, questioning how he could support us while we were killing our soldiers. Nevertheless, he agreed to release the statement as I had requested.

I was not alone in this view; even Kittu shared my belief that we should not confront India. At that time, after sustaining injuries from a

grenade attack in Jaffna, Kittu was in India, managing the LTTE's propaganda activities. I also spoke to Bala Anna (Anton Balasingam), who had been staying in Bangalore on a low profile and planning to escape to London. He also accepted my position.

It was against this backdrop that in 1988, at the suggestion of the Indian government, the LTTE engaged in negotiations with India's foreign intelligence agency, the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW). Kittu and I represented the LTTE in these discussions in Chennai. The Indian government consented to several of our demands, including establishing an interim government and inaugurating a police academy in the North and East. In my opinion, This was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for Tamils and LTTE to steer towards a Federal state or separate state with more lifesaving and fewer casualties. All we would have needed was patience.

Due to the history of Sri Lanka, psychologically, India is perceived as a threat and an adversary by Sinhalese regimes. No Sinhalese leaders were content or in agreement with the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord and India's direct involvement; it was akin to a forced marriage. This situation could have been a significant trump card for the Tamils following the implementation of the 13th Amendment. However, Prabhakaran muddled the plan over a single issue – the participation of a Sri Lankan government representative in the interim government. This greatly frustrated me.

I sent a message to Prabhakaran questioning why he opposed the Interim Government over a minor issue and the political purpose of continuing the war with India etc. I mentioned that if there is no reasonable answer, I will not contribute any more to the LTTE. His response was dismissive, accusing me of displaying my 'true Vellalar caste behavior' and suggesting that if I feared confronting the Indian Army, I should leave the organization.

I then departed from the LTTE with a heavy heart, realizing that Prabhakaran's foolishness and utter stubbornness would lead to

unimaginable tragedies for Sri Lankan Tamils. At that point, I completely disengaged myself from the armed struggle.

I must clarify that I never accused Prabhakaran of being casteist or discriminating based on caste. I did not perceive him as holding any animosity towards the Vellala caste. I believe that my letter, which challenged his decisions, provoked his anger, resulting in his harsh response.

The Prabhakaran I knew did not show preferences or aversions based on religion. Although a Saivite, he treated individuals of other faiths without discrimination. I was profoundly shocked when the LTTE expelled Muslims from Jaffna in 1990, as this action contradicted the Prabhakaran I knew, who transcended caste and religious prejudices. In this respect, I can affirm that he possessed the qualities of a true gentleman.

During the period between the first and second Thimphu peace talks in 1985, an informal discussion took place, attended by representatives of various militant groups, including EPRLF's Padmanabha, TELO's Sri



*From left to right - Appapillai Amirthalingam, then Leader of the TULF; Anton Master, former Military Office Chief of the LTTE; and Murugesu Sivasithamparam, Member of Parliament from TULF.*

Sabaratnam, and EROS's Ratnasabapathi. Prabhakaran, Balasingam, Thilakar, and I were present to represent the LTTE. At this meeting, while everyone was sitting at the round table, Ratnasabapathi walked from his chair, held Prabhakaran's both shoulders, and said, 'He is a Karaiyan,' alluding to his Karaiyar caste. Prabhakaran, however, showed no signs of resentment or anger; he merely smiled and continued engaging in the conversation. This incident reinforced my belief that caste and religious prejudices did not sway him.

**Prominent LTTE figures such as Kapil Amman and Mathavan Master, who ascended to key roles, were initially under your guidance in the Military Office (MO). Could you elaborate on your methods for identifying and cultivating talent within the organization?**

I am trying to remember who Kapil Amman was and in which division he worked. Mathavan was a gentle, joyful, and dedicated man. In MO, everyone was given equal opportunity and treated fairly. I did not act as if I were in command. People working at MO were hardworking and dedicated. We held board meetings to discuss and approve matters. That



*Kapil amman*



*Mathavan Master*

was not a common practice within the LTTE.

**Presently, certain ultra-Tamil nationalist parties appear to mirror Prabhakaran's ideology and methods. How do you perceive the perpetuation of his legacy in the current political climate? Do you believe this approach benefits the Sri Lankan Tamil community?**

History serves as a classroom where the wise learn not to repeat mistakes. We all should draw lessons from the errors of Prabhakaran, who was undoubtedly a real and dedicated fighter. It is unwise to repeat the mistakes he and the LTTE made.

There is no easy, straight path to freedom, whether the chosen vehicle is democracy or armed struggle. There will be steps to cross and steps to sit on along the way. Beggars have no choice; no one heeds the voice of beggars. The way to success is to gather strength, power, and resources, increase self-sufficiency in every way, and consolidate and reorganize at each step before moving on to the next step.

The most destructive and counterproductive action occurs when those who believe in armed struggle interfere with those who have chosen democratic methods to assert their rights.

Tamils must engage with the Sinhalese to foster mutual understanding between the communities. Sincere and continuous dialogue between these groups can significantly hasten the journey toward a solution.

*To be continued...*



# Deepika Varatharajan: Melody and Mastery



BY:

**Our Reporter**

In the Jaffna Monitor's new series aimed at inspiring the youth, we commence with an interview featuring Deepika Varatharajan, a distinguished singer from India.

Deepika began her musical journey at the age of three, guided by her parents, Geetha and Varatharajan. Her talents were honed under the mentorship of Pandit Prasad Khaparde and Sudha Ragunathan.

Known for her versatility, Deepika has contributed to various film soundtracks, collaborating with renowned directors such as Ilayaraja and A.R. Rahman. Her melodious voice is featured in films like 'Baahubali,' 'Dil Se,' and others. She has also showcased her acting talent in the television serial 'Kaiyalavu Manasu,'

directed by the legendary K Balachander.

This interview marks the start of a series that highlights the stories of professionals designed to motivate our youth. We explore Deepika Varatharajan's career, providing insights into her musical journey. We plan to publish this series of interviews monthly.

## How were you introduced to the world of music?

My introduction to the musical world began at home, thanks to my mother, Geetha Varatharajan, a trained Carnatic Music singer who has worked with the renowned music composer Ilayaraja. Her dedication to Carnatic Music was a constant presence in our home. Similarly, my father, Varadarajan, is a fervent music enthusiast, and his side of the family has always had a deep appreciation for music. From my early childhood, music has been an ever-present element in our household. I grew up watching my mother practice Carnatic Music daily, which naturally piqued my interest in learning it. It felt almost instinctive to start learning the basics of Carnatic Music from my mother right at home.

As I progressed in my musical training, I underwent formal instruction under the guidance of Vittal Ramamurthy, followed by lessons from O.S. Thyagarajan, Vijayaraghavan, and Vairamangalam Lakshmi Narayanan. Upon reaching an advanced stage in Carnatic music, I had the privilege of becoming a disciple of Sudha Ragunathan. I spent many years under her tutelage, which greatly deepened my understanding and honed my skills in Carnatic Music. For the past 10 years, I have been learning Hindustani Classical music from Sri Prasad Khaparde.

## With the advancement of technology, is the traditional Guru-shishya method still necessary for learning Indian Classical music from a guru, or can newcomers learn it through different means?

I believe there's no real substitute for learning Carnatic Music from a guru in person. Advanced technologies can certainly offer support, but they cannot take the place of a guru's role.

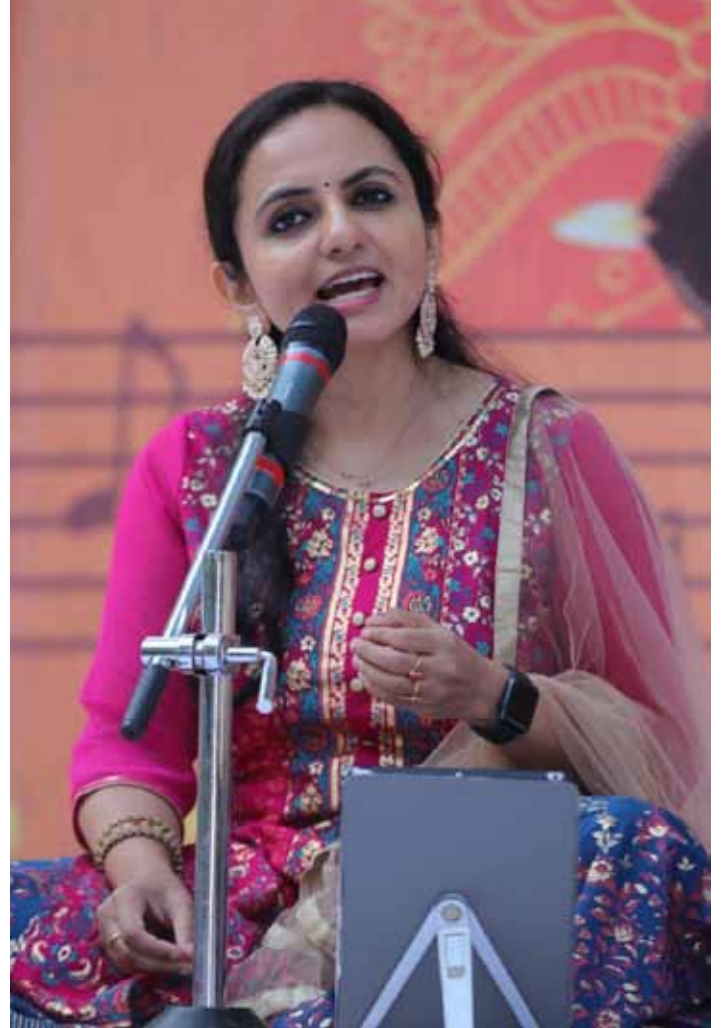


Originating from the Vedas, Indian Classical Music has been passed down through oral tradition for centuries. These new technologies are best used as supplemental aids. For example, over the past 10 years, I've been learning Hindustani music from Prasad Khaparde, a senior disciple of Ustad Rashid Khan, who is based in Nashik, Maharashtra. I make it a point to attend his classes in person as much as I can, but when that's not possible, I continue my lessons through Skype. This technology serves as a helpful aid, but I firmly believe that I could not have comprehensively learned Hindustani music merely by watching videos of my guru on YouTube.

**You are well-versed in both Carnatic and Hindustani music. Could you discuss the similarities and differences between the two styles? And do you have a preference for one over the other?**

It's difficult for me to choose a favourite between the two, as I deeply love both forms of classical music. In my view, the fundamentals of both Carnatic and Hindustani music are quite similar. They share the same notes, and there are common ragas in both traditions. Moreover, each has adopted a few ragas from the other. However, despite these similarities, there are distinct differences as well. Carnatic music performances are primarily composition-based, and we do a lot of improvisation.

In a Hindustani classical music concert, for example, we say we are performing Raag Yaman, wherein we include two or three bandishes (short composition) and focus fully on improvisation. Each style has unique characteristics and beauty, making them equally appealing to me.



**Managing language barriers must be challenging, especially since you can't speak all the languages associated with Carnatic and Hindustani music. How do you overcome this challenge?**

Carnatic music predominantly features compositions in Telugu, but it also encompasses songs in Tamil, Kannada, and Sanskrit. Conversely, Hindustani music is deeply rooted in the Braj language, a dialect of Hindi. This genre not only includes region-specific songs, like those in Marathi or Bengali, but its compositions are also extensively influenced by Urdu. Furthermore, I have learned to speak Hindi to deepen my understanding and enhance my performance of Hindustani music.

When it comes to singing regional languages like, say, Marathi or Bengali, which have their own unique accents, I seek help from native

speakers. Fortunately, I learned Sanskrit from my childhood and even completed my bachelor's degree in it. My proficiency in reading and writing Sanskrit is quite high. Tamil is my mother tongue, and I'm also fluent in English. My Sanskrit knowledge has been immensely helpful. When I need to learn a song in a language other than Tamil, I prefer to write it down in the Devanagari script, which is used in Sanskrit. This approach has greatly aided my pronunciation, ensuring it never goes astray. Additionally, I've learned to write and speak Hindi. When it comes to singing in Bengali, which has its own unique nuances, I seek help from native speakers.

### **Having sung for nearly all the major music composers in the South Indian film industry, do you have a favourite song that you've performed?**

Yes, over the years, I have had the privilege of singing for almost all the renowned music composers in the South Indian film industry, starting from my childhood. My favourite song is 'Irul Konda Vaanil' from the movie 'Baahubali.'

### **What advice would you offer to a young person from Jaffna aspiring to become a great musician like yourself?**

The first step is to find a good teacher, regardless of the type of music you wish to learn. Engaging in continuous practice is crucial; there are no shortcuts in music, and it's certainly not a cakewalk. One must practice diligently and with unwavering determination. Also, immense patience is necessary. Learning music is fundamentally different from acquiring other degrees. In music, there is no definitive



endpoint – it offers a lifetime of learning opportunities. To understand all the nuances of a single raga can take more than a lifetime. So, to all newcomers, my advice is to remain patient and keep practising.

### **Have you visited Sri Lanka and Jaffna?**

Yes, I had the opportunity to visit this beautiful country once in 2010. I came along with the renowned dancer Alarmel Valli. We spent only two days in Jaffna, but even in that short time, I was mesmerized by the rich culture and beauty of the place. And, of course, the warmth and hospitality of the people of Jaffna left a lasting impression on me.

### **With tourism flourishing in Sri Lanka and an increasing number of tourists from India visiting, do you have plans to visit Sri Lanka again anytime soon?**

I would love to revisit. I have been longing to return to Sri Lanka, a country of immense beauty. Many of my close friends have recently travelled there, and their experiences have further fueled my desire to visit. I hope I can make the trip soon.

# A Symphony of Solace



BY:

**Kenga Shandralingam**

Not only has language ceased to be a barrier to enjoying beautiful music, but I've also realized that a lack of musical knowledge isn't a hindrance either. Although I've never sought refuge in a music class, even during the rain, I now find myself mesmerized by music for extended periods. My hands clap to the rhythm instinctively, without any conscious direction from my brain. At times, I even lose track of hunger. Hymns, once monotonous and grating to me when accompanied by only one or two instruments, now fully captivate me. I feel as though I'm journeying through an uncharted land, bewitched by the performance's beauty.

During festival times in Nallur, the sight of people seated simply on the sandy ground, engrossed in expert Carnatic concerts, used to seem like a voyage to a foreign world to me. I now regret having felt that way years ago. This transformation began after I accidentally stumbled upon a performance by Deepika Varadarajan on YouTube's QFR program last year. Although she performed only a few songs, my subsequent searches about her opened a gateway to a vast realm of traditional music.

It has now become a routine for me to watch and relish a song or two in the afternoon or before bedtime. What distinguishes her from other musicians is her ability to perform any song, in any language, with unwavering devotion and seemingly effortless elegance. Her music flows softly like a stream, then swells like a mighty river, and finally cascades down like a waterfall from a mountain peak. Throughout her music's dynamic and multidimensional journey, her divine, radiant smile is a constant presence from the beginning to the end of each song. Observing her maintain this continuous smile is a rarity I have not seen in any other artist.

As Kalki's music reviews suggest, the essential qualities of a singer are a 'sweet voice, extensive



musical knowledge, and expressive capability.' From my modest but expanding understanding of music, Deepika clearly possesses these qualities in abundance. Her artistry seamlessly fuses these elements, creating an absorbing and emotional experience for the audience. Her performances, marked by both technical expertise and deep emotional expression, establish her as an artist of extraordinary caliber. Her divine voice masterfully guides each song, while her captivating presence ensures that the audience's eyes and hearts are firmly fixed, making the journey through her songs a delightful escapade.

Typically, one doesn't start listening to Deepika's songs with the intention of stopping after just one; it invariably turns into an extended session. Yet, no matter the length, her music leaves you feeling light and uplifted, as if floating in the air. Despite her notable career in the film industry, her musical contributions there are scant, which leaves her admirers longing for more of her captivating voice, a pillar of Tamil music. For over a decade, during my regular medical

check-ups in Bangkok, I have been consistently prescribed migraine medication. The end of the war in Eelam and witnessing the conditions at the 'Manik Farm' camp, where the surviving Vanni people were treated inhumanely, has been deeply distressing. Consequently, severe migraines have become a persistent part of my life. However, six months ago, during a visit to my doctor, I declined the migraine medication, prompting a look of surprise from him. Indeed, ever since I started listening to Deepika's songs daily, those once essential pills have become redundant.

Keep singing, the luminous star of music.

***NOTE: This article was written by Kenga Shandralingam, a humanitarian officer currently attached to an international organization in Myanmar. He is a writer, motivational speaker, and music enthusiast.***



# Beyond Shanthan: Honoring the Many Faces of the LTTE



BY:

**J. Kumar Babu**

Supporters of the LTTE, who previously claimed that Shanthan, arrested in 1991 and convicted in the Rajiv Gandhi assassination case, had no involvement with the LTTE, have recently written extensively about his involvement with the organization and its operations following his death. They now acknowledge that he was a LTTE member and buried him in the Ellankulam Thuyilum Illam (resting place) or Ellankulam Martyrs' Cemetery of the LTTE.

Shanthan's younger brother, Mathisutha, went a step further by detailing the services Shanthan rendered to the LTTE. He outlined Shanthan's involvement, noting that during his high school days at Uduppady American Mission in 1988, Shanthan planned several attacks against the Indian army. These attacks were carried out with other LTTE members: Salam, David, Gobu, Arjuna, Raghuvaran, and Neelan. It is noted that Raghuvaran, also called 'one-eyed Sivarasan', was the mastermind behind the Padmanabha and Rajiv Gandhi

associations, while David was the assassin in the Padmanabha case. This clearly indicates the connection Shanthan has with these two high-profile assassinations.

Mathisutha also noted that after finishing his high school exams, Shanthan served as a direct combatant in the war and travelled to India by boat for higher studies in commerce, living near the EPRLF office in Chennai. He wrote that, in relation to the Padmanabha assassination case, the Supreme Court sentenced Shanthan to nine years in prison. Upon his return to Sri Lanka, he was appointed responsible for the entire island and operated under the name 'Thinesh.'

He also mentioned that Pottu Amman never missed eating at his mother's house whenever he was in Mallavi, indicating a close familial relationship between Shanthan's family and the LTTE. Therefore, his burial in the Ellankulam martyr's resting place is viewed as appropriate by all LTTE supporters. I have no opposing view on Shanthan being commemorated by LTTE supporters.

However, my question remains: Do we remember all the LTTE fighters? The answer is no. Anyone with an iota of conscience would acknowledge that we don't remember all the LTTE fighters who took up arms for the liberation of Sri Lankan Tamils.

I am haunted by memories of Tamil Nadu youths who, driven by the plight of our own Sri Lankan Tamils, joined the LTTE to fight against the Sinhalese government. This still bleeds my heart and gives me nightmares.

During the peak of the Eelam struggle, numerous Tamil youths from Tamil Nadu, fueled by ethnic solidarity, volunteered to fight for Tamil Eelam. The LTTE ferried them here by boat, provided arms training, and integrated

them into the organization. I personally knew a few youths from Tamil Nadu who joined the LTTE; I met them in the Vanni jungle. They were genuine warriors, motivated solely by their profound love for the Sri Lankan Tamils. While we, Sri Lankan Tamils, had the duty to fight for our people, these Tamil Nadu youths were driven purely by their deep affection for us.

Tragically, Pottu Amman, the intelligence chief of the LTTE, harboured suspicions that some of the passionate youths from Tamil Nadu were infiltrated by RAW (The Research and Analysis Wing, India's foreign intelligence agency). Following directives from Prabhakaran and Pottu Amman, a heartbreaking fate befell the majority of these fighters. Despite the lack of solid evidence of their alleged association with RAW, these young individuals, who had selflessly journeyed to aid our cause, were ruthlessly executed by the LTTE.

During my time with the LTTE and its intelligence wing, I witnessed Pottu Amman's inability to produce even a shred of proof against these innocent youths from Tamil Nadu. Even high-ranking LTTE leaders, in confidential conversations with me, condemned this savage act of fratricide orchestrated by Pottu Amman under Prabhakaran's orders. Yet, they remained publicly silent, paralyzed by the fear of repercussions.

The memories of these young fighters still torment me, robbing me of sleep. How could a freedom organization eliminate scores of youths merely on the basis of suspicion or paranoia? How can we possibly justify such actions? If we do, we are neither a freedom movement nor even human. Are these Tamil Nadu youths, I estimate around hundreds, remembered? The answer is tragically no.



*Aerial View of the Mullivaikkal on May 18, 2009*

Have we ever acknowledged these innocent souls who journeyed all the way from India to fight alongside us? We've even concealed the truth from their families. Just as Shanthan's mother yearned and agonized for her child, the mothers of these Indian youths must have endured similar suffering. Shanthan's mother's love for her son, her longing for his return, and her desire to feed him even a single morsel of rice with her hands is heartbreakingly understandable. But doesn't this tragedy also apply to the mothers of the Indian youths?

Do we remember the Muslim fighters of the LTTE, who were killed due to the leadership's paranoia? In the 1980s, a large number of Muslim youths, numbering in the hundreds, joined the LTTE, driven by their thirst for a sovereign Tamil land. However, when relations between Tamils and Muslims deteriorated in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the LTTE leadership mercilessly killed hundreds of its own Muslim guards, suspecting them of being agents of Sri Lankan intelligence. I personally knew a few of these Muslim youths. It still breaks my heart to know that some of them were killed in such cunning ways. They were

summoned to a battlefield and then shot dead from behind. I prefer not to elaborate further.

Do we remember our covert black tigers (மறைமுக கரும்புலிகள்) publicly? Pottu Amman once told me that there were around 300 covert black tigers. These black tigers conducted massive operations. The first attack by the covert black tigers occurred on March 2, 1991, in Colombo on Havelock Road, killing Ranjan Wijeratne, the then ruthless Minister of Defence, involving a car bomb.

The LTTE's intelligence wing's Colombo head, Charles, masterminded the attack. The individual who carried out this first concealed Tiger operation was Prem, who initially worked as a driver for Dominic, the then-political head of the Jaffna district. Later, Prem was inducted into the intelligence unit and subsequently into the covert black tigers, a special unit within the intelligence wing. I met Prem a few times and talked with him also. He had a round face and a great, inviting smile. He was a good driver, too.

The members of this specialized unit were

not publicly acknowledged. Instead, their commemoration occurred privately, primarily on August 19, the anniversary of Sivarasan's death. These confidential memorials, often led by Pottu Amman, serve as a notable indication of the LTTE's involvement in the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi. The observances were characteristically discreet. I attended a few of these memorial functions, where I learned about the covert Black Tigers. However, this memorial event is very private, to the extent that even most members within the LTTE ranks were unaware of it. The LTTE never made these memorials public.

However, a few former LTTE leaders who escaped the war are likely aware of these undercover operatives. What stops them from publicly honouring these individuals, though?

It's important to note that not all operations by the covert Black Tigers were driven by a broader mission. In some cases, these attacks, orchestrated by the LTTE, even targeted Tamil

civilians—the very community they claimed to represent. A notable example occurred on May 15, 2009, just days before the LTTE's complete military defeat. That evening, between 5 and 5:30 PM, the LTTE carried out what would be their last suicide attack. It was executed by a covert Black Tiger operative named Anpu. I had met Anpu several times at the LTTE's training base, strategically located in a small forest near the edge of the Iranamadu Tank in Vattakachi.

The attack resulted in the majority of casualties being Tamil civilians, not members of the Sri Lankan army. I wasn't at the attack site, but by a tragic twist of fate, I found myself where the attack was commanded – at the Undiyal Pillayar Kovil Panakudal (உண்டியல் பிள்ளையார் பனங்குடல்) in Mullivaikkal. I took refuge at the back of the temple in a small bunker.

You should also bear in mind that at the time of this incident, the territory of Tamil





Eelam, which the LTTE had been fighting for, had shrunk to less than 4 square kilometres. In such a situation, it was evident to any reasonable observer that the LTTE could not recover from this significant military setback and was on the brink of comprehensive defeat. Despite this, the LTTE still orchestrated that massive suicide attack.

Inside our bunker, key figures from the Black Tigers, including Premanath Master, a notorious figure within the LTTE, and Anpu Master, arrived to deliver orders for a lethal suicide mission. Earlier, the LTTE had salvaged a 500 kg bomb, which had been dropped by the Sri Lankan Air Force but failed to explode. They repurposed this bomb for the suicide attack, placing it in a Mitsubishi pickup truck.

The initial strategy was to launch the attack when the army was within reach. However, by May 15, 2009, the LTTE's area of control had drastically reduced. Despite this and the presence of hundreds of their own civilians, they decided to proceed with the suicide mission. I was in the bunker when Premanath Master and Anpu Master issued the final command to the suicide bomber, also named

Anpu, through a walkie-talkie.

Listening in, I overheard Anpu report that he was on his way, but his view was obstructed by a large screen set up by the army to conceal its side activities. He mentioned seeing no military personnel, only Tamil civilians. From the tone of his voice, it was clear he was reluctant to carry out the suicide mission, fully aware that it would lead to the loss of hundreds of lives from his own Tamil community.

Despite his apparent reluctance, hesitation, and pleas, Premanath Master coldly instructed him to continue, dismissing concerns about civilian casualties with the command 'சனத்தை பற்றி யோசிக்காம அடி' (hit the target without thinking about the people). Anpu Master further spurred him on, motivating him to proceed with the brutal suicide attack by reminding him to recite the motto, 'புலிகளின் தாகம் தமிழீழ தாயகம்' (The thirst of the Tiger is the Nation of Tamil Eelam), when he detonated the bomb. Shortly after, a massive explosion reverberated. Anpu had triggered the 500 kg bomb, killing himself and, as I estimate, around 300 Tamil civilians in this horrific act of war crime by the LTTE.

Later, I purposefully met with a sniper from the LTTE, who was assigned to clear the path for the vehicle. He was stationed near the large screen set up by the army to conceal their activities. He informed me that the Sri Lankan army was actually far from the screen, dealing with the Tamil civilians through loudspeakers and keeping them in large numbers along the road, waiting to be searched and allowed passage one by one. He revealed that no army personnel were near the site of the attack, and as a result, the casualties were predominantly Tamil civilians, with only a few army personnel harmed.

Are we remembering these innocent Tamils who perished in this brutal act of war crime by the LTTE? Or are we recalling the covert LTTE Black Tiger suicide bomber, where the bomber detonated the device against his will and with apparent hesitation? We are not, are we?

Before this attack, the LTTE executed a merciless suicide bombing targeting its own civilians on February 9, 2009. A female LTTE suicide bomber detonated herself near an Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) centre in the Vishwamadu area of Tharmapuram. This attack led to a significant number of civilian casualties, along with a few army personnel.

In the days leading up to this attack, approximately 8,000 Tamil civilians had relocated from LTTE-controlled territories to areas under army control. People were in a state of profound distress; they lacked food, proper sanitation facilities, and running water. The Sri Lankan army conducted heavy shellings over every inch of the land controlled by the LTTE, prompting people to move to areas under army control. The army welcomed them, providing adequate food and facilities, which was highly reassuring. This strategy aimed to treat the civilians well, thereby

encouraging more Tamil people to defect. In an attempt to stop this migration of Tamils to the army side, the LTTE resorted to a brutal suicide attack.

A leader from the LTTE's intelligence wing, Thuronar, acting on orders from Pottu Amman,

dispatched a female Black Tiger to carry out a bombing at a checkpoint. This attack resulted in high civilian and military casualties.

Subsequently, the army's approach towards Sri Lankan Tamils underwent significant changes. Becoming highly suspicious of those surrendering, the army, after this attack, demanded individuals to surrender fully unclothed, a measure that was deeply humiliating.

Commemorate Shanthan and make him a hero; I have no issue with that. But at least, possess a sliver of conscience to remember every LTTE fighter who took up arms to fight for our own Tamils. And remember all the Tamil civilians killed directly by the LTTE, labelled as traitors or caught in the LTTE's cruel, ruthless missions on their side.



*Thuronar*

***Note: This article has been written by J. Kumar Babu, a pseudonym chosen by a former LTTE veteran for personal reasons. The content presented here is based on his narration to our reporter from the Jaffna Monitor.***



## Lone Opposition Voice: Sumanthiran in Key Economic Meet

In a notable departure from the norm, M A. Sumanthiran, an Ilankai Tamil Arasu Kachchi parliamentarian, attended a crucial meeting convened by Sri Lanka's President Ranil Wickremesinghe. This gathering was centred on the nation's ongoing economic crisis and its interactions with the International Monetary Fund (IMF). His attendance was significant as he was the sole opposition lawmaker present, diverging from the collective stance of major opposition parties like the SJB and JVP, who boycotted the event in protest against the IMF's stringent reform demands, including tax hikes criticized for disproportionately affecting lower-income individuals.

During the meeting, Sumanthiran highlighted issues surrounding the transparency of the government's dealings with the IMF, specifically the non-disclosure of Technical Assistance Reports. He argued for their release to opposition members, aiming to scrutinize the rationale behind the IMF's recommendations.

His concerns extended to the IMF's current programs, questioning their benefit to the country's poorer populations. He pointed out alternatives to the recent VAT increase, like

adjusting the withholding tax, which he believed could be more effective for revenue generation.

Meanwhile, MP Dr Harsha de Silva exemplified the opposition's broader stance, which preferred discussions with bondholders rather than directly engaging with the IMF. This perspective highlighted a nuanced approach within the opposition, indicating varied strategies towards addressing the nation's economic challenges.

Therefore, Sumanthiran's decision to attend the meeting represents a divergent approach within the opposition, reflecting the complexities and varying strategies at play in Sri Lanka's efforts to navigate its challenging economic landscape.

# Who is the Traitor?

Part-3

**Exclusive  
Interview  
with Karuna  
Amman**



BY:

**Kaniyan Pungundran**

கணியன் பூங்குன்றன்

**Is it true to what extent you said that the Eastern Province fighters were marginalized under the leadership of the Tigers?**

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam organization (LTTE) comprised 26 main structures, and this number would increase if smaller structures were included. However, individuals from the Eastern Province were not appointed to leadership roles or even to second or third-level responsibilities in any of

these structures. It is unclear whether this was intentional or unintentional, but Eastern fighters were significantly excluded from leadership positions.

In the context of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam's organizational structure, Pathuman was the commander for Trincomalee, while I held the commander position in Batticaloa. These appointments were notable exceptions, as no other individuals from the Eastern Province were assigned leading roles, nor were they given secondary or tertiary positions in any other divisions of the organization.

Fighters from the Eastern Province actively participated in all divisions of the LTTE, including intelligence, politics, finance, and the Sea Tigers. After my decision to leave the LTTE, the organization attempted to demonstrate its impartiality by promoting Eastern figures like Karikalan and Marshal to leadership roles. However, this action was viewed by many as merely a superficial gesture rather than a genuine commitment to inclusivity.

However, I firmly believe that the unequal treatment of Eastern fighters by the LTTE leadership was not the driving force behind my departure from the organization. At that time, we did not perceive such disparities as urgent or significant. We followed our leader Prabhakaran's decisions without question or opposition, irrespective of whether he appointed leaders from the East or the North. Our primary commitment was to the larger cause — the liberation struggle of the Tamil people. Therefore, the preferential treatment of Eastern fighters was not a major concern for us and did not influence my decision to leave the LTTE.

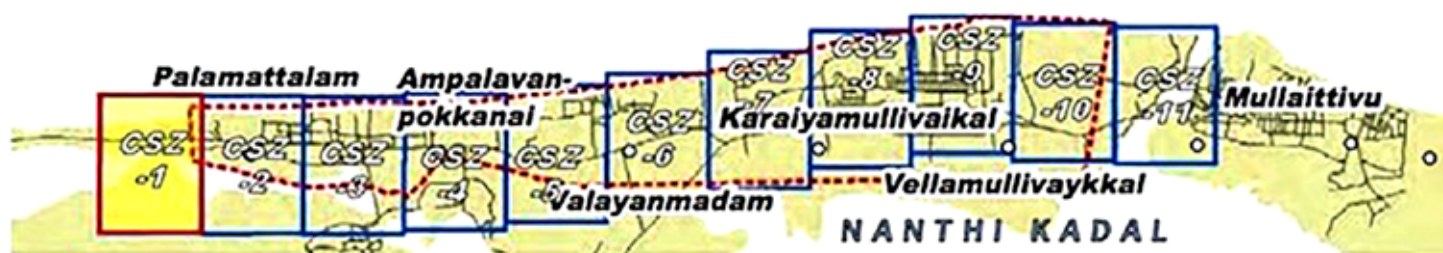
**If you hadn't separated, some believe**



**the Liberation Tigers wouldn't have lost the final battle, while others say that if Karuna hadn't separated, there would have been another Mullivaikkal tragedy in the Eastern Province as well. What is your opinion on this?**

Had we, the Eastern fighters, not separated from the mainland Vanni Tigers, the war might still be ongoing today. As a key strategist behind several of the Tigers' earlier critical battles, I likely would have played a similar role in the final battle, where Prabhakaran met his demise and the LTTE faced military defeat. I am convinced that had I been with Prabhakaran, he would not have met his end in the Nandikadal Lagoon, abandoned like an orphaned corpse.

The commanders who strategically orchestrated my departure from the LTTE ultimately failed. Not only were they unable to save their leader and the organization, but they also acted incompetently and met their demise en masse in the final days of the conflict.



I believe that Prabhakaran might have disregarded my military advice during times when the LTTE was faring well, but he would likely have considered it during dire situations when the challenges were immense.

Had we not parted ways, the LTTE would almost certainly still be engaged in conflict to this day. However, whether we would have eventually emerged victorious in the war remains a matter of debate. On that point, I still harbor uncertainties.

## Why is it so?

A war is only truly victorious when military successes are translated into political victories, and this aspect was notably absent in Prabhakaran's strategies and within the LTTE. Prabhakaran concentrated solely on military means and never fully embraced the potential of political victories during his lifetime. Therefore, I believe that military triumphs alone would not have been sufficient for the ultimate success of our cause.

Therefore, if we, the Eastern fighters, had not separated, we would have possessed the strength and capability to combat the Sri Lankan army. I believe that had we been present, neither the Tigers nor their leader, Prabhakaran, would have met their tragic fate at Mullivaikkal.

## Okay. How would you have prevented Prabhakaran's death and the military

## defeat of the LTTE in the final battle?

There's a theory that guerrilla warfare often evolves into conventional warfare as it expands. An insurgency, initially employing guerrilla tactics, gains ground and subsequently transforms into conventional warfare. While reverting to guerrilla tactics after this shift is difficult, it is not impossible. As the war neared its end, the Tiger leadership should have switched back to guerrilla warfare. This represents a critical mistake by the LTTE leadership – they persisted in a losing war using conventional military tactics, following the misguided advice of their commanders.

There isn't a single forest or area in the North and East that is unfamiliar to me. The Vanni mainland, replete with dense forests and naturally hidden spots, some almost unknown, provided numerous opportunities for concealment. Yet, instead of taking refuge in these extensive forests, the LTTE leadership retreated to a place like Mullivaikkal, from which escape was virtually impossible.

Had the Tigers reverted to guerrilla tactics in the final stages and retreated into the forests, they might have continued the fight, potentially sparing the Tamil people some of the war's brutalities. Instead, the LTTE leadership funneled both their fighters and civilians into a virtually inescapable position at Mullivaikkal. This decision was not only foolish and nonsensical but also demonstrated a glaring lack of military insight. Any military strategist,



*Photos Depicting the Brutal Reality of the Final War,  
Culminating on May 19th, 2009.*

even with a basic understanding of warfare, would have advised against such a retreat. The mystery remains as to who counseled Prabhakaran to move to Mullivaikkal. Surprisingly, Prabhakaran, known for his military acumen, acquiesced to this strategy.

If the Tigers had shifted back to guerrilla warfare, their leader, Prabhakaran, might have survived. Had I been in that situation, I certainly would have adopted this strategy. I would have turned the Tiger fighters into guerrillas, potentially saving both the organization and its leader, Prabhakaran. The extensive wilderness of the Vanni region provides ample opportunities for effective guerrilla warfare.

**What is your opinion about the atrocities that the LTTE unleashed on its own people in the final war?**

In the final battle, the LTTE resorted to using its arms and ammunition against the Tamil people it claimed to represent, engaging in desperate and reckless forced recruitment. Tragically, the LTTE employed their own people as human shields. Moreover, those who attempted to flee the conflict zone were met with lethal force, shot and killed by the Tigers.

During the LTTE's final defeat at Nandikadal Lagoon, I was serving as the Minister of National Integration and was involved in overseeing the resettlement of people at that time. I met many individuals who were victims of the LTTE's final war madness. They shared stories with me about the atrocities committed by the LTTE in the war's last stages. In some cases, the LTTE even killed fathers who resisted the forcible abduction of their sons. Additionally, some LTTE fighters and leaders emotionally explained to me how a freedom movement, built on the dedication and sacrifices of its fighters, degenerated into a ruthless, heartless organization that abducted children in the final stages of the war.

It's a tragic scenario indeed. Had I been present, I would have certainly opposed such actions. Resorting to the forced recruitment of young people is a definitive sign that a freedom struggle has lost its moral compass. One must question the kind of fighting spirit



that can be expected from youths coerced into combat. True efficacy in battle necessitates genuine motivation, something that cannot be anticipated from unwilling participants.

**One of the major accusations against you is that you also engaged in forced recruitment, and there are credible pieces of evidence supporting this claim. It is alleged that the worst instances of recruitment occurred in the East during your tenure as a commander. What is your response to these allegations?**

Leader Prabhakaran introduced the 'One Fighter per Household' initiative, drawing

inspiration from Singapore. He mandated that one member from each household join the Tigers, instructing all district commanders of the LTTE in the North and East of Sri Lanka to enforce this policy. This was an attempt to mirror Singapore's compulsory military training. The commanders and fighters in the East, known for their unwavering loyalty to Leader Prabhakaran, readily complied with his orders, even when it involved challenging tasks such as forced recruitment.

Forced recruitment was a reality in the Eastern Province, and I must acknowledge my responsibility in this matter. It is, however, crucial to recognize that a significant number of individuals from the East joined the movement voluntarily. The results of this initiative were mixed—approximately 50% successful and 50% unsuccessful. While many mothers were opposed to this practice, there were also those who willingly permitted their children to enlist.

The forced recruitment that took place during my tenure as a commander is an undeniable fact. Another incontestable truth is that it was carried out under the directives of Prabhakaran and was not solely initiated and implemented by Karuna Amman. Prabhakaran's control over the organization was so absolute that no action could transpire without his awareness. He wielded his authority over the Tiger organization with an iron fist. We, the commanders and members, were essentially executors of his commands.

During this time, the influx of youths joining the LTTE from the North diminished, as many parents chose to send their children abroad for safety. As a result, many recruits from Eastern regions like Batticaloa, Ampara, and Trincomalee joined the Tigers. These Eastern fighters, often engaged in battles in the North, primarily believed they were fighting to protect



leader Prabhakaran. In fact, our Eastern fighters played a crucial role in saving Prabhakaran's life on several occasions, starting with the 1989 Operation Checkmate by the Indian forces.

Therefore, when I decided to leave the LTTE, I was faced with a crucial decision regarding my fighters. I ordered the Eastern fighters under my command to disarm and return to their homes to avoid a devastating conflict with the Vanni Tigers. This decision was taken to prevent a fratricidal conflict. As a result, approximately 6,000 Eastern fighters were spared from further violence and sent home. My primary goal was to avoid a bloody confrontation with the Vanni Tigers. Thankfully, this decision allowed these young individuals to reunite with their families and remain alive.

Additionally, I must acknowledge a painful part of our history. After the departure of the Indian Peace Keeping Force, the LTTE

was responsible for the ruthless elimination of around 8,000 members of other militant groups in a fratricidal massacre. This event has left me with a deep sense of agony and guilt. To prevent further fratricide, I made the decision to send my fighters home.

**Do you now regret the forced recruitment? If you hadn't engaged in recruitment, those young people might still be alive, right?**

Honestly, I do harbor regrets about my actions, even though they were executed on the commands of Prabhakaran.

However, it's crucial to note that there were no major battles following the forced recruitment of fighters from the East. The split within the Liberation Tigers organization occurred in 2004, at a time when these recruits were still in

training. As a result, the majority of the Eastern fighters who were conscripted did not engage in active combat. This, fortunately, meant that their lives were ultimately spared from the violence of war.

Nevertheless, it's important to acknowledge that thousands of Eastern fighters lost their lives in earlier battles in the North, such as the Jayasikurui operation, the attack on the Pooneryn camp, and the battle of Elephant Pass. It is noteworthy, however, that most of these fighters had joined the organization of their own volition.

Even in my capacity as the commander of the East, I maintain the belief that when a liberation movement like the LTTE resorts to forced recruitment, it is a harbinger of impending

failure. Such actions signal diminishing support from the people for the cause. Despite holding this conviction, I adhered to the orders of my leader, Prabhakaran, in matters of recruitment.

Initially, young individuals like myself joined the struggle willingly. Joining the Tigers was a challenging process at that time; candidates were selected only after several trials. Subsequently, we launched intensive campaigns to recruit more people into the organization. However, this eventually led to forced recruitment. The forced recruitment that occurred in Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu during the final battle represented a significant betrayal by the Tigers and their leader, Prabhakaran, to their own people.

*To be continued.*

# Mahathaya's Saga:

## Power, Paranoia, and Politics in the LTTE



**Part-6** *Will Appear in the Next Issue*



# Sri Lanka Cricket's revival: A myth or reality?



By:

**Dr. Aravinthan  
Arunthavanathan**

As Nuwan Thushara's late-swinging slingshots shattered the stumps of Bangladeshi batters, making the ball behave as if it were tied to his hands by an unseen string, it was déjà vu for Sri Lankan fans. Is Sri Lankan cricket on its route to revival? Is it myth or reality? One might wonder. This is a dilemma we have faced many times before, only to end up disappointed.

It wasn't an uncommon sight to see a man with a similar action dismantling opponents with unconventional terror arising from sheer unorthodoxy. But more than the 'we've been here and seen this before' feeling, it showcased Sri Lanka's immense depth in bowling. I dare say that at no point in our history have we had such variety and depth in our bowling department. It's a serious statement, considering we were blessed to witness Vaas, Murali, and Malinga playing together in the past.

The very opportunity to make such a statement seems paradoxical, considering our current state of affairs in T20Is. However, with two consecutive wins against Afghanistan and Bangladesh, it's inevitable that thoughts of a strong showing in the upcoming WT20 will begin to sprout in the minds of fans.



## Then where do we stand, and what can we hope for?

Let us be realistic. On paper, we have a bowling attack, which is on par with any. Chameera, when fit and firing, is a dream. Madushanka has shown what he can do barely a few months before at the ODI World Cup. Theekshana and Wanindu have demonstrated their worth and past their honeymoon periods. Yet the combination of a mystery spinner who can bowl in powerplays and stem the run flow at the death together with a gun leg-spinning all-rounder is a gift any team would pay any fortune to acquire in a T20 side. The above alone is filthy rich on paper. It doesn't end there.

Add to that two slingers from the Malinga School of Bowling. Pathirana and Thushara

can be darlings and demons on alternate days. The pendulum can swing in your favour or the other way in extremely ecstatic and frustrating ways. Yet possessing these to modern artilleries is a blessing beyond imagination.

A fit Mathews, with his skill and experience, has the potential to catch opponents off-guard in powerplays. The Sri Lankan bowling lineup looks supreme on paper, but 'on paper' is the key phrase. What really matters is what transpires on the field. This is largely determined by fitness and the ability to convert potential into performance. It's unpredictable whether all these individuals can synchronize to create a synergy that resonates like a symphony in the hopeful hearts of Sri Lankan fans. However, considering where we were just a few years ago, the mere luxury of hoping for such magic is a blessing for any fan.



How these players will emerge post-IPL, especially in regards to fitness and match readiness, will be extremely important. There is a high chance that Pathirana and Theekshana will be exposed in this year's IPL, as teams will know that getting the better of them is key to succeeding against CSK. This will impact Sri Lanka's campaign. Surely, there will be a few frustrating injuries and loss of form. Yet, the pipeline is so strong that we should be able to overcome these issues and field a potent attack.

A potent attack – that's the key, the ultimate game changer in T20s. It's worth remembering that potent bowling attacks were crucial to Sri Lanka's early dominance in the T20I era. This lineup, surely on paper, has the potential to match their predecessors. The million-dollar question is whether they will be fit and smart enough. That remains to be answered.

While the bowling equity seems well funded, the batting cannot boast of the same. However,

the encouraging facet is an almost settled lineup with few batters contributing consistently. While none of them are on par with the global T20 standards, as reflected by the non-selection of any, even in IPL squads, they can derive inspiration from the past. In 2014, merely months before the World T20 triumph, the likes of Sangakkara, Mahela and Dilshan formed the core of Sri Lanka's batting. While many reasons were attributed, the simple fact was that IPL dynamics filter those who fall behind the pace at which the game is evolving, and selection and auction prices, more often than not, indicate the T20 worthiness. They found a way to execute a winning campaign, playing to their strengths despite lagging behind. The current lineup up too should strive for the same.

Nissanka's newfound aggressive approach, Mendis's composure and consistency, Sadeera's stability and Kamindu's assuredness, together with Asalanka's adaptability, can surely help Sri Lanka put decent scores, which would give the bowling attack a chance to leverage in favour of the team. They may not have the experience of their predecessors but surely they have the necessary skills to put on a decent show.

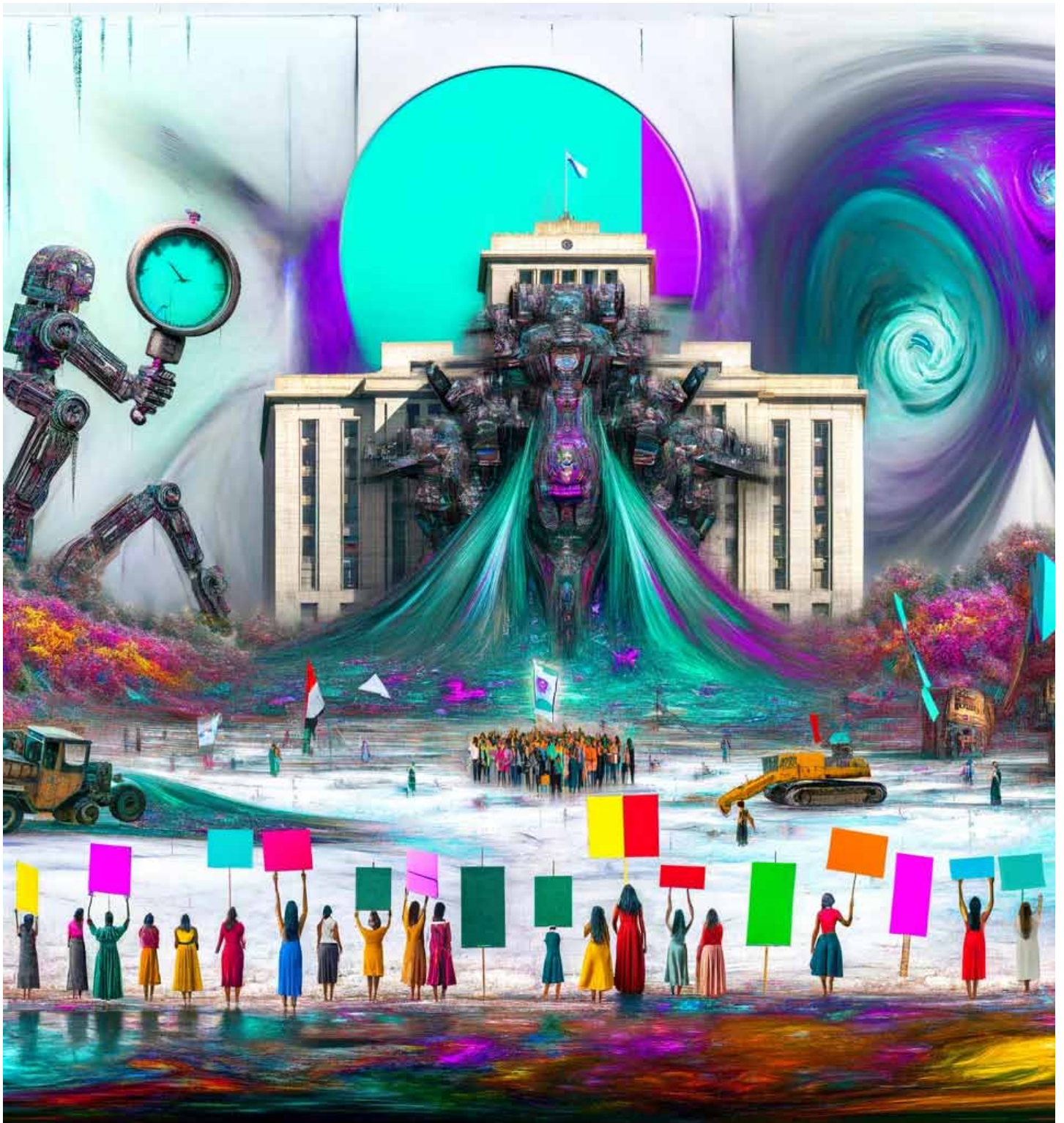
Overall, these two series wins shouldn't mean much, considering Sri Lanka's past legacy. But the present is different. Despite having a team that looks good on paper, there are



shortcomings that could be exposed by better teams. However, these wins suggest that Sri Lanka is well on its way to becoming a better team among the lower-tier teams. That's a good starting point. There is a sense of clarity, newfound freedom, and accountability. The signs are promising. A semi-final berth would be a jackpot. But a strong run towards a semi-final berth, achieving at least a 5th or 6th position finish, would be a good deal given the current context.

Is Sri Lanka's resurgence a myth or reality? No one would know. However, given the talent pool and the latest developments, one cannot be found at fault for assuming or at least hoping that it's not a myth but a reality in the making.

# Heavy Tax on Feminine Hygiene: Sri Lanka's Critical Challenge



A recent study by the independent think tank Advocata has highlighted the undue financial strain placed on women in Sri Lanka due to current taxation policies. These findings come at a critical time as the country undergoes a review of its bailout program by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), with the delegation including female members, underlining the issue's significance.

The study reveals that nearly 52% of Sri Lanka's population, which is female, is bearing the brunt of a steep increase in the cost of menstrual hygiene products. This surge has led to around 40% of women, aged between 15 to 47 years, ceasing the purchase of sanitary products, which annually cost them about Rs. 4,500.

In the wake of an economic downturn characterized by mismanagement, corruption, and the embezzlement of public funds, the government's emphasis on revenue generation, even at the expense of essential women's products, has been a source of growing concern and criticism. There are fears that such policies might pave the way for more aggressive taxation measures.

Despite women's vital role in various economic sectors, their needs are being consistently overlooked in policymaking. This neglect was starkly evident on International Women's Day, where male politicians expressed verbal support for women but did not address the high taxation on critical products such as sanitary napkins.

In the nation's Parliament, a handful of female MPs have been vocally pushing for more reasonable pricing of women's hygiene products. However, their campaigns have largely fallen on deaf ears in a legislature dominated by male voices. Notably, Opposition Leader Sajith Premadasa has been an active supporter of this cause, yet he, too, faces ridicule from government MPs.

The issue is compounded by the insufficient representation of women in Parliament, signalling a dire need for broader female political participation.

There is also a call for more expansive social support initiatives, such as improving school facilities with proper sanitation for underprivileged children. Opposition Leader Premadasa's efforts in enhancing educational infrastructure set an example for other political figures to follow.

At the heart of this issue lies an urgent requirement for governmental policy realignment, focusing more on the welfare of its citizens, particularly the vulnerable segments. Addressing the taxation on women's hygiene products and children's school supplies is not only beneficial but essential, intersecting the realms of economic policy, social justice, and gender equality.



# The F Group

Translated from the original Tamil short story ***F iyakkam*** (இயக்கம்) by Shobasakthi

Translated by:  
**Eluttukkinivan**  
(எழுத்துக்கினியவன்)

At first I gave the title ‘The X Group’ to this story. It is a story about two former Tamil militants. Both had migrated to Europe many years ago as political refugees. I did not know which militant groups they belonged to or whether they belonged to the same group. An important story-telling technique for this story is to advance the story while keeping the reader wondering which groups these two men belonged to, sustaining the mystery even after the story has been told. Therefore, I followed the hallowed tradition of denoting the unknown by the

symbol ‘X,’ to call the story ‘The X Group.’

I was in for a shock when a friend of mine, as soon as he heard the title, asked me, “Is this a story about the Red Front of Tamil Eelamists?” It was only then, after a very long time, I remembered that a Tamil militant group called RFTE did indeed exist until 1985. My friend was a consummate expert on the history of the Eelam struggle. He had in fact authored two research articles on the topic. In confusion, I asked him, “How can you tell me that it is a story about RFTE without even reading the story?” He responded, “The leader of that group was called Xavier. So, X represents the first letter of his name.”

I was astonished that he would guess such a connection existed. Although ‘X’ was a common symbol widely used from mathematics to pornographic movies, I did not immediately comprehend that it could also represent the first letter of a militant group leader’s name. On sober reflection, I realized that many such pivots and shifts in meaning had taken place during the past twenty-five years. Earlier, *cakkai* used to mean pomace or bagasse, the weak, useless stuff that remains after useful juice has been extracted out of fruits or vegetables. But now *cakkai* refers to a potent explosive that can completely pulverize the target without leaving anything behind. Earlier to put on a *poṭṭu* was auspicious, but now it referred to making a woman a widow. Even the verb ‘to kill’ has many neologisms in popular usage among Tamil militant groups: ‘dumping’, ‘hitting on the head’, ‘knocking’, and ‘*maṭṭai*.’

Since I was very keen to not leave any room for readers to guess which militant groups our dramatis personae belonged to, I resolved to look for a different letter instead of ‘X.’ Only when I attempted to find an alternative letter, did it dawn on me that this was not an

easy task. English has only twenty-six letters. But our struggle has had thirty-seven militant groups and countless leaders. I started from the letter ‘A’:

A—Arular  
B—Bālakumar  
C—Chandrahāsan  
D—Douglas Dēvāṇandā  
E—EPRLF, ENDLF, and so on  
F—...  
G—Gñāṇasēkaraṇ alias Paranthaṇ Rājaṇ  
H—Hensy Mohaṇ  
I—Inbam  
J—Jegaṇ  
K—Karuṇā  
L—LTTE  
M—Muhunthaṇ  
N—NLFT  
O—Oberoi Thēvaṇ, .. and so the list continued, leaving only the letter ‘F’ unoccupied. Therefore, I have adapted it. Now let’s see if you can still make guesses.

He left Paris on a Lufthansa plane. He would transit in Frankfurt to board the plane to Colombo. After going through checking at Frankfurt, he boarded the plane to Colombo and took his seat. The seat next to him lay empty. His instinct told him that a beautiful German girl would come to take that seat. But the reality was that his instinct was lousy at making predictions that would come true.

At least once a month, his instinct had told him that his father would pass away any day. But bedridden and sick, *appā* was still clinging on to life. Whenever the phone rang in the wee hours of the morning, he expected news of *appā*’s death. For a long time, he anguished over the question of whether he should go to Sri Lanka to see *appā*. Sometimes he hoped that if news about *appā* did indeed arrive, it would deliver him from the suffering of this anguish. Once, when he got drunk in the evening, he slapped himself



silly as penance for harboring such a thought.

It was customary for his friends at work to acquiesce to requests for money from their families and friends in Vavuniya or Colombo. Those requests were for religious festivals like Deepāvali or New Year, or for special occasions like weddings, or for education. But neither his elder sisters nor brothers-in-law ever asked for money for such reasons. They always asked for help in dealing with appā's illness, like money to take him for treatment

in Colombo or India. But it didn't appear that they ever moved appā even an inch from the mat on the floor where appā languished. Sometimes one sister would ask for money without the knowledge of the other, or they would complain about each other. They came up with new excuses for not taking appā to Colombo for treatment. When he quizzed his brother-in-law about this, the response put the blame squarely on the political situation in the country, flinging obscenities to curse the dead husband of Chandrika Bandaranaike and the

mother of Ranil Wickremasinghe and the wife of Mahinda Rajapakse. Sometimes he thought if anyone were to ask him, “How long has your father been ill?” he should reply, “From the Chandrika Kumaratunge era.” It seemed like appā was a hostage to his sisters, like a ship that had been boarded by Somali pirates. Appā was of ripe old age. But they would not let the old man die. No abductor would willingly lose possession of the object on which he is demanding ransom.

He wondered whether he thinks like this because he had lost his love for his father and siblings. On deeper reflection, he realized that it is not just about appā but that he truly loved no one and no one loved him. He thought that external compulsions pushed one to pretend to love. He often murmured the well-known saying in the diaspora, ‘All familial ties are because of money.’ Just like the greeting ‘vaṇakkam’ or the word ‘visa’, this saying, too, has become a normal part of the diasporic lingo.

But last week when his elder sister called him on the phone and said, “*Appā* will not make it through this time,” and that he wakes up with a start from time to time asking if he had come back to Sri Lanka to see him, he finally decided to go to see his father one last time. When his mother died, he had been in France for just three years. *Ammā*’s body was cremated without a son at hand to light the pyre. *Appā* had wept, praying to avoid a similar fate. As soon as he decided to go to Jaffna, his mind went into a tumult. Visions of his village and relatives and friends all trooped into his mind, making him a little afraid. When he imagined wearing a *vetṭi* to light *appā*’s funeral pyre, he felt a sense of unease. When he put on his seat belt in the plane, his instinct told him that the news of *appā*’s death would await him when he landed.

Moments before the plane was ready to

depart, a fat, dark-complexioned man walked towards his seat in a somewhat agitated state. The fat man’s eyes darted between him and the empty seat next to him, without even a smile in greeting. Eventually, as if there was no choice, the fat man squeezed into the empty seat with a stern expression, struggled to put the seat belt on, and started reading the German magazine. He glanced furtively at the address tag on the bag that stood behind the fat man’s legs and struggled to read it. It said, ‘Arumaināyagam Theivēnthiraṇ, Dortmund, Germany.’

For half an hour after the plane took off, he had tried everything, clasp and unclasp his fingers, rocking his legs, and so on. He felt that he had reached the point that continued silence was no longer appropriate. He looked at his neighbor through the corner of his eye. He felt that the neighbor did not avert his gaze but returned it. He was full of questions. As he rehearsed his opening line and turned to speak, the neighbor broke the silence first. The conversation started with a silly question.

“Are you Tamil?”

He told his neighbor that he would go to Jaffna from Colombo because his father was on his deathbed. The neighbor said essentially the same thing, about having a mother who was on her deathbed from mouth cancer, in a Jaffna village. When the neighbor asked if he was married, he lied and said, “yes.” The neighbor said he worked in a printing press in Germany and had three children. He responded that he worked at a supermarket in Paris, and that he had been in France for twenty years. The neighbor had been in Germany for twenty years. Both were returning to Sri Lanka for the first time since they left the country. He said his name was Chandran. The neighbor responded with the name ‘Māraṇ.’

He had already noticed that the address tag on

the carry-on bag indicated that the neighbor's name was 'Arumaināyagam Theivēnthiran,' so he guessed that Māraṇ may be a nickname. During the conversation, it occurred to him that he had seen his neighbor somewhere. While his tongue kept on talking, his eyes were trying to penetrate Māraṇ's eyes. Suddenly he felt a chill down his spine. He was certain that he had seen Māraṇ somewhere before, and the image of Māraṇ holding a gun began to form in his mind. The image was hazy, painted with smoke. His instinct warned him that his neighbor was from a militant group. At the same instant when he stopped talking and turned his gaze towards the window, the neighbor, seemingly relieved, leaned back on the seat with eyes closed. He racked his brain trying to recall where he had met Māraṇ before.

### 1984 March

After the landmine explosion next to the Buddhist *vihāra* in Jaffna, the army emerged from Jaffna fort and burnt down a part of the Periyakadaï area. After an hour of frenzied destruction, as the army left the city, the militant groups entered it.

The boys from the militant groups transported the injured off the road, and the dead bodies that lined the road and lay inside shops. They commandeered vehicles along the road to facilitate transportation. When news emerged that the army was heading out on foot from the Nāvatuḷi army camp, the boys grabbed their guns and hurried towards Nāvatuḷi on bicycles and motorcycles. Some fighters were impatiently waiting to donate blood to the wounded they had brought to the General Hospital. The big doctor signaled them to come inside to donate blood, leaving their guns outside.

The announcement over the plane's public address system instructed passengers to fasten their seat belts again. The plane had hit some

turbulence and was heaving up and down. He glanced at the display in front of him and noticed that they were flying over Bulgaria. He turned his head towards his neighbor. Māraṇ was reading a newspaper. Those eyes, nose, and thick lips were unforgettable. But he could not recall exactly where he had seen them. He was sure he saw them with a gun.

### 1985 July

All militant groups, protesting that the peace talks under way in Bhutan would not bring salvation to the Tamil people, had launched a great march from Maruthaṇāmadam towards the University of Jaffna campus. School girls walked first, followed by the general public, with vehicles bringing up the rear. Boys from the militant groups lined up on either side of the marching column to ensure that it moved in a disciplined manner. Different militant groups had taken over different tasks in managing the march. They shouted slogans in unison.

"Is Bhutan your grandpa's house?"

"No, no to talks, Tamil Eelam till our last breath!"

"We won't be fooled by the Thimphu theater!"

"We won't sell out our principles; We won't betray our martyrs!"

When the people marching reached the university campus and sat down, the play '*maṇ sumantha mēṇiyar*' was performed. In the public meeting that followed, representatives from all militant groups addressed the crowd. Since the second level leadership of many groups were among the speakers, armed bodyguards stood watch around the stage.

When the stewardess came around with



tea, his neighbor took the teacup from her and handed it to him. He smiled back in thanks. Māraṇ returned the smile. He had definitely seen this smile before. The smile, accompanied by a gun.

### 1986 April

Under the cover of darkness, the navy had advanced from their Kārainagar base and camped out at St. Antony's College in Kayts. Before dawn, a militant group laid siege around the college. Inside there were at least two hundred sailors. Outside, there were barely twenty fighters. They had only one M16, two G3s, six AK 47s, four submachine guns, one repeater gun, and some hand grenades. The navy had artillery and rocket-propelled grenades. A helicopter hovered over the college.

At around seven in the morning, the boys from the militant group commenced their attack. All twenty of them were hiding behind boundary walls and on leafy trees. The boys

behind the wall stood up from different places at different times to shoot at their targets and throw hand grenades. The helicopter began its fireworks. It was shot at, too. The navy trapped inside kept shooting in all directions without letting up. When a young boy—perhaps seventeen—stood up with a submachine gun, his head was shattered by the navy's light anti-tank weapon fire.

At around eight, two helicopters landed special commando forces at a salina, a small distance from St. Antony's College. The commandos advanced towards the college at breakneck speed. This put the boys in a real bind. They had the navy in front of them and the commandos in their rear. Although they had the possibility of a retreat, it did not look like they wanted to. They had divided up into two groups and were shooting in both directions, as if they had decided to die that day.

As the noose tightened and it seemed like the boys from the militant group could not escape,



a different militant group came through Meliñchimunai to attack the commando force from its rear. This group had two-inch mortars of their own manufacture. The commandos were totally shaken. They changed direction to retreat towards the sea at Thambaddy. Now this other group with their mortars approached the navy camp at St. Antony's College. When this group goes into battle, it does so with at least fifty people. Not all of them were necessarily trained fighters; sometimes they rallied village folk into battle; if there were

not enough guns, they were armed with sticks and poles.

The two militant groups left the eastern flank open for the navy to retreat and surrounded them on the remaining three sides. By about ten, other groups had shown up with whatever arms they could muster. If one group ran out of ammunition, another group lent some. Injured fighters from different groups were transported away in the same vehicles. By about five in the afternoon, the navy started

to retreat. The militant groups chased them as far as the beach. The next day, one group published a pamphlet saying, “thank you to comrades who stood shoulder to shoulder with us.”

The purser announced that the plane was about to land. He had exerted every cell in his brain trying to recall, in vain, where he had seen his neighbor before. He was rolling his eyes and biting his lips. He resolved that as soon as he disembarked, he would go on his way without running into Māraṇ. The neighbor then asked, “Where are you going to stay in Colombo?” Startled, he answered, after a moment’s hesitation, that he was not going to stay in Colombo and had already bought a plane ticket to Jaffna in the morning. That was a total fabrication. His sister would be waiting at the airport in Colombo. He would have to discuss with her before deciding when to go to Jaffna. The neighbor smiled with his eyes, evidently in pleasant surprise, and said, “I, too, am flying to Jaffna in the morning. I guess we will meet again on the plane tomorrow.” He, too, smiled, pretending to be pleasantly surprised. But he was smoldering inside. He thought that if only the fat man was holding a gun now, he would surely have made a positive identification. He decided that it would be futile for him to expend more effort on trying to remember where he had seen Māraṇ before. He resolved that it would be wiser to stay out of sight from Māraṇ once he landed.

At the airport, Māraṇ followed him to the immigration counter. He cleverly let Māraṇ go ahead of him in the lineup for immigration. He could overhear Māraṇ speak in Sinhala to the immigration officer. He himself did not know a word of Sinhala. Seeing Māraṇ speak in Sinhala somehow saddened him. After passing immigration, he looked around. The fat man from Frankfurt was nowhere to be found. He made a beeline to the restroom,

locked the door and stayed put inside for a while.

‘Perhaps I have a brain fog that is making my memory hazy, but there is little chance that the fat man would have had similar trouble remembering me. Perhaps he recognized me right away at first sight. Even when he was chatting with me, he was using the technique of repeating what I said. Even his name, Māraṇ, is not a common name in Jaffna. Names like Māraṇ, Parithi, Sangili, were adopted by fighters from militant groups.’ As he was musing thus, he remembered that his *nom de guerre* in his own militant group was Peter. He remembered the proverb from the Bible that said, ‘Those who live by the sword die by the sword.’ Standing in the restroom, he was perturbed thinking, “I should have stayed put in Paris, where I withdrew into my shell for twenty years. Now having returned to step foot on my land once again because of my love for *appā*, I am confronted with fear and left without peace of mind.” Swear words about his father were on the tip of his tongue. He grew worried about how long he had spent inside the washroom. Concerned that it might lead to new problems, he reluctantly opened the door and stopped out.

The fat man Māraṇ was waiting outside the restroom. They pretended not to have seen each other. He walked with a steady gait towards the baggage claim area. His bag was circling on the luggage carousel all alone. He grabbed it and hurried outside.

Outside, the area for people waiting to receive arriving travelers was crowded. Sinhala and Tamil conversations filled the air noisily. Not finding his elder sister, he was flustered. Seeing him standing alone, some people approached him to ask something in Sinhala. He walked past them with a forced smile. His eyes darted hither and thither looking for the fat man, Māraṇ. Eventually he went



to stand next to a policeman standing guard with a gun. Strangely, that gave him a sense of security and calm. Eventually when his elder sister and brother-in-law found him, he snarled at them. His brother-in-law said that their vehicle was ready. He walked towards the vehicle listlessly. He was a little apprehensive about leaving the side of the policeman. In fact, writing a story about him is draining. It is difficult to understand what he would be thinking, what would worry him, what would make him happy, or what would

rattle him. As if this is not trouble enough, his instinct tends to drag the story in a different direction.

With his sister and brother-in-law, he stayed at a lodge in Colpetty. His brother-in-law asked him, “When should we fly to Jaffna?” He responded, “Let us stay in Colombo for a few days to do a bit of sight-seeing.” Their faces brightened up on hearing this. His sister said, “There are a lot of things to see in Colombo.” He grumbled silently that the old man was

on his deathbed but they wanted to go sight-seeing in Colombo. But his instinct told him it would not be wise to go to Jaffna now. If he closed his eyes, the dark face of the fat man Māraṇ appeared in front of him to torment him.

When his sister and brother-in-law went sightseeing, he feigned illness and stayed put in his room for two days. He did not even want to walk around in Colombo but curled up into a ball and stayed on his bed. There were militant groups in the north and militant groups in the south. He did not even know where to stretch his legs on the bed. He even considered returning to France but felt that it was not right to run away when news of his father's death could arrive at any time. Once again, he felt the urge to see appā's face once before he passed on. The same urge overcame him once before in Paris and had dragged him to this point. Once he felt this urge, he thought perhaps meeting Māraṇ on the plane was just an ordinary occurrence, and that the feeling of having seen him before with a gun could also have been an illusion. He had consumed the half-a-bottle of white wine he was served on the flight over from Paris and had topped it up with three glasses of wine at Frankfurt airport. He knew that wine could in fact induce fantastically imaginative hallucinations. Once, when he went to work at the supermarket drunk, he had shelved cans of cat food on the shelves meant for baby food. Cat food cans have labels with cat faces. Baby food cans have labels with faces of babies. That day, cats had appeared like babies to him. Once he decided that he would go to see his father, he went out to buy flight tickets to Jaffna. The ticket agent was just across the street from the lodge. When he emerged from the lodge and crossed the street, he saw the fat man Māraṇ standing next to a tea shop. His feet refused to move. He recovered within an instant and started walking in the opposite direction. He knew that Māraṇ had seen him.

What was he doing here? Did he not say that he was traveling to Jaffna the day after he arrived in Sri Lanka? He was walking towards the beach. But rattled, he turned to walk towards the Colpetty police station. Occasionally, on the pretext of adjusting his shoes, he stopped to glance back.

That night, he told his brother-in-law that they must change to a different lodge. His brother-in-law was utterly confounded. They moved to another lodge in Kotahena. His sister was keen to buy the clothing necessary for their father's funeral. She said it was not easy to find good quality clothing in Jaffna, and even if they did, the prices tended to be exorbitant. She bought a veṭṭi for him, and clothes for the grandchildren who would have to hold aloft lighted torches during the funeral rituals.

He left the room only to go out to eat. He told his sister that the scorching sun did not agree with his constitution. On the fourth day at the new lodge, he returned to his room after breakfast with a newfound enthusiasm. Relief had washed over his face. He told his brother-in-law to buy tickets to Jaffna right away. His village, his relatives, and old friendships rejuvenated within him. When he imagined appā's funeral, and lighting the pyre in his new veṭṭi, he was thrilled. The news of the death had reached him that morning. It was published in the rolled-up newspaper in his hand, accompanied by a photo of that dark fat man. The man, a native of Jaffna 3rd Cross street, and a resident of Germany, had been shot dead in Jaffna Hospital Road by unidentified assailants on a motorcycle. For some reason, he carefully placed that newspaper in his bag and closed it.

Thus ended this story, with a whimper.

**June 2009**

# Voice of the Reader

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At JaffnaMonitor, every voice matters — and every perspective is welcome. Whether it's a word of appreciation, a constructive critique, or a differing viewpoint, we believe in fostering a space where conversations thrive. We invite all to share their thoughts and engage in meaningful discourse regardless of political leanings or affiliations.

Our articles are penned with care, research, and dedication, but we acknowledge the diverse perspectives of our esteemed readership. If your submission equates to our quality, credibility, and relevance standards, we're more than happy to give it a platform.

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Reach out to us at [hellojaffnamonitor@gmail.com](mailto:hellojaffnamonitor@gmail.com)

Let's craft a narrative that resonates with every corner of our community.

# Your Voice, Our Pages

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We understand that the most vibrant ideas often come from unexpected places. That's why we're opening our pages to passionate contributors like you. Whether it's a piece of investigative journalism, a heartwarming personal essay, a thought-provoking opinion piece, or even a poetic reflection — we want to hear from you.

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