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Verugal Massacre:

**20 Years Since the
Most Infamous Betrayal**

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The Verugal Tragedy - Confronting Shadows from Our Past

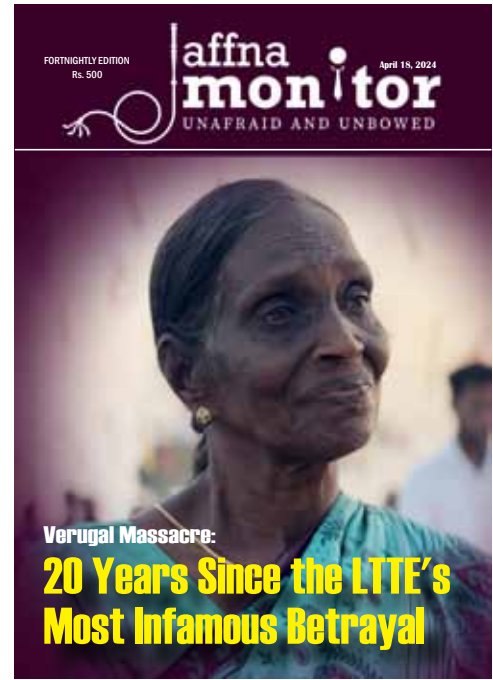
Dear Esteemed Readers,

We extend our warmest wishes for the Tamil New Year. Regrettably, we must also convey our apologies for the tardiness of this fortnightly edition of the Jaffna Monitor, initially slated for release on April 15th. This delay was necessitated by the New Year's leave granted to our dedicated staff—a well-earned respite, though it has postponed our schedule.

In this issue, we delve into a narrative that, despite its relative obscurity, persistently echoes in the hearts of those who experienced it firsthand—the Verugal massacre. This somber chapter unfolded two decades ago, characterized by fratricidal strife that saw Tamils in tragic conflict with their own kin. Recounting these events transcends mere historical records; it acts as a potent cautionary tale against the repetition of such harrowing conflicts.

Upholding our dedication to journalistic excellence, our inquiry took us to the eastern locales of Verugal and Kathiraveli. Here, the very atmosphere is laden with the resonant legacies of anguish. Our correspondents engaged in comprehensive dialogues with former Eastern LTTE combatants, survivors, and pivotal figures such as Karuna Amman, the erstwhile Eastern LTTE wing chief; Pillayan (Sivanesathurai Chandrakanthan), currently the State Minister for Rural Road Development of Sri Lanka; Jeyam, former commander of the Visalakan Brigade; and Savithiri, erstwhile leader of the Mathana Regiment. These discussions enriched our portrayal of this deep-seated internecine conflict, infusing our understanding with complexity and insight.

The massacre, executed by the Northern faction of the LTTE against their Eastern counterparts, remains emblematic of the internecine violence that has indelibly scarred our collective history. We, as journalists born



in Jaffna, embrace an intrinsic obligation to illuminate such neglected horrors. The revelation of these truths is indispensable, serving not only as a mechanism for communal healing and understanding but also as a safeguard against the recurrence of such atrocities.

We are acutely aware that by elevating this discussion, we might alienate adherents of the mainland LTTE and devotees of Prabhakaran. Nonetheless, our editorial stance is resolute: fidelity to truth supersedes partisanship. The journey toward reconciliation and unity is paved through the rigorous examination of our past, no matter the discomfort it may bring.

As you peruse this edition, we invite you to ponder the critical role of remembrance and truth in shaping a future distinguished by peace and mutual understanding. By memorializing the victims of the Verugal massacre and acknowledging our common humanity, we affirm that no conflict should ever sever these bonds.

We are grateful for your ongoing support and patience as we navigate these imperative, albeit challenging, narratives. It is only by confronting our history with openness and resolve that we can aspire to cultivate a resilient and unified society.

Warm regards,

கணியன் பூங்குன்றன்
Kaniyan Pungundran
Editor- Jaffna Monitor



Aerial view of the Verugal River

Verugal Massacre: 20 Years Since the LTTE's Most Infamous Betrayal

BY:
Kaniyan Pungundran
கணியன் பூங்குன்றன்

The image above provides an aerial view of the Verugal River. The right side of the river belongs to Trincomalee, while the left side belongs to Batticaloa—two important districts of the Eastern Province. The tranquil waters of the Verugal River gracefully delineate the natural boundary between these districts. Majestically situated on the right bank, the sacred Verugal Kandaswamy Temple stands as a beacon of spiritual significance. This revered site captures the gaze of onlookers and stirs their souls with its serene beauty and profound peace. The river, flowing gently past this spiritual landmark, adds a rhythmic and soothing backdrop to this picturesque setting, inviting peace and reflection.

The Verugal River, drawing its lifeblood from the verdant highlands and enriched by the waters of the mighty Mahaweli Ganga, gracefully snakes its way to the Indian Ocean along Sri Lanka's eastern coast. More than just a waterway, this river serves as a vital artery for the Eastern Province, nurturing the communities that flourish along its banks with sustenance and economic opportunities. Beyond its role as a lifeline, the Verugal River whispers tales of ancient mariners—the storied Alexandrian seafarers knew it as the Barraces, a testament to its prominence on the maps of the legendary cartographer Ptolemy in the 2nd century CE.

The river also stands as a silent witness to contemporary history, reflecting the turbulent events of the Verugal massacre that have shaped the quest for Tamil liberation in Sri Lanka. Two decades ago, this serene riverbank was the scene of a harrowing betrayal when the Vanni LTTE, under orders from LTTE chief Prabhakaran and intelligence wing chief Pottu Amman, launched a devastating attack across its waters against its own Eastern fighters. In this grim assault, approximately 210 Eastern fighters were mercilessly killed. These fighters, under the command of Karuna Amman—the then-military leader of the LTTE's Batticaloa and Ampara districts—were tragically caught in the crossfire due to escalating internal disagreements with LTTE supremo Prabhakaran.

The invasion was a meticulously coordinated military operation. The LTTE's formidable infantry unit, the Charles Anthony Brigade, along with the Sea Tiger unit, artillery, and motor units, were all employed in the assault. Ironically, almost all the Eastern fighters and commanders on the Batticaloa side of the Verugal River were oblivious to the impending attack. Similarly, most of the rank-and-file

fighters were also unaware of any tension between their leadership and the Vanni leadership.

The attack on the Eastern fighters commenced in the early hours of April 10th, during a ceasefire agreement between the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE. Most of the Eastern fighters, who were deeply asleep, initially mistook the assault for an attack by the Sri Lankan army. However, as they intercepted wireless communications, the reality of their situation became starkly clear—it was the Vanni Tigers, not the army, who were mercilessly attacking them. From the intercepted messages, they heard the commanding voice of Banu, a key LTTE commander, which confirmed their worst fears. The Eastern fighters were bewildered and could not understand the reasons behind this sudden betrayal.

Jayam, a former commander of the Visalakan Regiment, told Jaffna Monitor in an exclusive interview that at the time of the Vanni Tigers' attack on the Eastern Tigers, three divisions of the Eastern Tigers were stationed along the banks of the Verugal River on the Batticaloa



Jayam, former commander of the Visalakan Regiment

side. These divisions included the Mathana Battalion, a women's unit; the Visalakan Battalion, a men's unit; and the Ranjan Battalion, a special forces unit. Collectively, these three battalions comprised approximately 500 Eastern fighters.

He also provided insights into the naming conventions of the Eastern forces. He noted that the formidable fighting force comprised of Eastern fighters was known as the Jeyanthan Brigade in the North, while it was referred to as the Visalakan Regiment in the East.

Jayam revealed that the high command leaders of the Eastern Tigers were aware of



*Jeyanthan Regiment: The Formidable LTTE Force
Comprising Exclusively Eastern Fighters*

the tensions between Karuna Amman and Prabhakaran. However, most ordinary fighters were oblivious to these tensions. 'Nobody expected the Vanni Tigers to attack their own comrades,' Jayam stated. 'We were not prepared for an assault,' he added, pausing before continuing, 'We had all the resources and manpower, including mortars, to defeat them and drive them back, but we were not psychologically prepared. How can we fight our own fighters?' Jayam celebrated as a hero in many significant LTTE attacks, including the famous Jayasikkuru assault and the Anaiyiravu base camp attack, posed this question.

Karuna Amman, in an exclusive interview with Jaffna Monitor, said that while he was aware that the Vanni Tigers were coming to the Verugal bank, he had also not anticipated an attack.

The Vanni Tigers launched their first surprise attack on the Mathana Regiment, a female fighting force of the Eastern fighters. Savithri, the determined commander and one of the first victims, disclosed to the Jaffna Monitor the unexpected nature of the attack. Unaware



*Karuna
Amman
alongside
Pottu Amman*

of any potential threats or defence strategies due to lack of information from the Eastern high command, she described how a Vanni Tiger fighter waded across the Verugal River, called out 'Savithri akka, Savithri akka,' and shot her in the thigh as she emerged, which quickly knocked her unconscious. Now enjoying a peaceful life away from conflict with her husband and children, Savithri reflected on that fateful day. She believes the assault was a deliberate attempt to dismantle her command. 'Why aim to disrupt my command? First of all, I was not prepared to battle my own brethren,' she disclosed.

She explained that her regiment's deployment at the riverbank was simply part of their routine training exercises. She clarified that they were not positioned there to confront the Vanni Tigers in case they crossed, contrary to what some journalists and writers have suggested.

Adding a layer of betrayal, Savithri recounted an incident just a day before the attack. A few

Vanni Tigers had casually crossed the river, engaging in a friendly game of volleyball with her troops and sharing a meal prepared by her regiment. Reflecting on these interactions, she now views these seemingly benign activities as a calculated reconnaissance effort, cleverly disguised beneath layers of camaraderie. This revelation casts a stark light on the cunning strategic methods that the LTTE leadership, especially its intelligence wing chief Pottu Amman, employed.

A former prominent fighter from the Visalakan battalion, stationed on the Verugal River, told the Jaffna Monitor, 'We were not instructed on what to do if the Vanni Tigers attacked.' Reflecting on it later, he now believes that Karuna Amman and his key commanders might have wanted to demonstrate the strength of the eastern fighting forces, which could explain why he ordered a few regiments to be at the Verugal bank.

In a discussion with Jaffna Monitor, Karuna Amman dismissed this claim, stating that



*Visalakan
Regiment*

stationing regiments at the Verugal River is standard procedure. 'The forces deployed on the Batticaloa side of the Verugal River primarily hailed from the Vagarai region; this was their standard posting,' he explained. 'Additionally, a few regiments were temporarily stationed there for training purposes over several months,' he added.

In an emotionally charged interview with the Jaffna Monitor, Karuna Amman condemned the attack on the Verugal River as not only inhumane but also cowardly. He recounted how the Vanni Tigers crossed the river at midnight and launched a brutal attack that explicitly targeted the women's unit, resulting in the deaths of many innocent women.

He revealed that after his decision to split from the LTTE, he wrote earnest letters to LTTE chief Prabhakaran and its political wing leader, S. P. Tamilselvan, pleading for the safety of the Eastern fighters. He implored the LTTE leadership to refrain from attacking the Eastern fighters and subtly suggested, 'If you are clever enough, you can kill me, but you should spare my fighters.'

Karuna Amman describes the Vanni Tigers' actions not just as a brutal attack but as a full-scale military operation, complete with heavy weapons. This assertion was confirmed by Jeyam, the commander of the Visalakan Regiment, and by Pillayan, a former LTTE commander who now serves as Sri Lanka's State Minister for Rural Road Development, in discussions with the Jaffna Monitor.

Pillayan also said that when he was contacted by the Vanni Tigers, who used sugar-coated talks to persuade him to return, he posed a critical question reflecting on the history of the Tigers. He recounted asking Banu and Ramesh, who were trying to win him back



Karuna Amman



Special Commander Lt. Col. Nakulan of the Charles Antony Regiment raises the regiment flag on the fifteenth anniversary of the formation of the brigade, April 10, 2006

over the phone, 'I scolded the Vanni Tigers who did not come when the clouds of war engulfed us in the East. Why are they now displaying bravery in peacetime?' Pillayan says that in LTTE history, Eastern fighters went to the North to fight and die, but Northern fighters never came East to fight. He told the

Jaffna Monitor that none of the Northern regiments or fighters had previously ventured to the East to battle the Sri Lankan army.

Unlike Pillayan, Jimkelly Thatha, and Robert—who were celebrated for their roles in the Jayasikurui Battle and the Elephant Pass Camp attack—other notable figures such as the LTTE Batticaloa district political wing leader Turai, Visu, and Nisam were swayed by the sugar-coated talks of Pottu Amman and his team. This persuasion led 18 key LTTE commanders to return to the Vanni Tigers.

Tragically, upon their return, they were deceitfully arrested and met with gruesome fates. Robert and Jimkelly Thatha were horrifically tied to a tree, doused with kerosene, and allegedly burned alive in Panchi Marathadi.

There are many versions of the burning incident; while many claim that these commanders were burned to death, a few allege they were shot dead, and their bodies were then burned. Additionally, there is ambiguity surrounding who was the perpetrator of this heinous crime. Some suggest it was ordered by Ramesh—the

Eastern commander after Karuna—while others suggest it was carried out by Nagulan, a right-hand man of Pottu Amman, who now resides near the Neerveli Kandaswamy Temple in Neerveli South and has taken up farming after surrendering to the military in the last war. Karuna Amman has repeatedly stated in interviews with the Jaffna Monitor that Nagulan was responsible for this heinous crime. However, he also stated that Nagulan could not have acted alone; the orders must have come from LTTE supremo Prabhakaran and its intelligence wing head, Pottu Amman.

Eastern fighters stationed at the Verugal River, who miraculously escaped the bloodbath, shared their harrowing experiences with the Jaffna Monitor. They recounted how the Vanni Tigers, led by commanders Banu and Ramesh, employed the most brutal tactics. The Eastern Tigers, reluctant to confront their own brethren, attempted to retreat but were ruthlessly pursued, hunted down, and mercilessly executed. Those who surrendered were bound, forced to their knees, and shot dead in cold blood.

In a particularly heart-wrenching episode that symbolizes a grotesque betrayal of the



The LTTE ID card of Nagulan



Col. Ramesh



A mother wailing as she lights a lamp to remember her daughter, an LTTE fighter, who was brutally killed by the Vanni Tigers in the Verugal massacre 20 years ago.

COVER PHOTO: AN INNOCENT MOTHER, WITH TEARS, REMEMBERING HER OFFSPRING—AN EASTERN FIGHTER—KILLED IN VERUGAL BY VANNI TIGERS AT THE 20-YEAR COMMEMORATION OF THE VERUGAL MASSACRE. **PHOTO BY: J. SATHU**

values espoused by freedom movements worldwide, female fighters from the East who surrendered were stripped and forced to kneel on scorching sand and hot stones. A few grief-stricken residents of Kathiraveli confirmed the atrocities perpetrated on the Eastern women fighters by the Vanni male Tigers.

A resident of Kathiraveli posed a question that left us at a loss for words. With a tremor in his voice reflecting his dismay and disbelief, he asked, 'The LTTE proclaimed itself a liberation movement, fighting for a separate nation, and even took pride in championing women's rights. How could it be,' he wondered aloud, his voice laden with a mix of anger and sorrow, 'that such an organization could even contemplate stripping its own female fighters?' His question hung in the air.

He continued, his voice heavy with grief: 'From the banks of the Verugal River to the next village, Kathiraveli, the bodies of the Eastern Tigers were strewn about like discarded remnants of a forgotten struggle. These fighters, who had once carried the dream of Tamil Eelam in their hearts, now lay forgotten, their bodies abandoned and decaying along the banks of the Verugal River and throughout the village of Kathiraveli.' He paused, his sorrow palpable in the silent air around us. 'As they walked over the remains of the Eastern fighters, the Vanni Tigers, following the cold directives of Prabhakaran and Pottu Amman, callously mocked and laughed,' he said, the bitterness evident in his tone. 'How could they betray their own with such cruelty?

The horrified residents of Kathiraveli village, confronted with the grim scene of dead bodies scattered throughout their village, attempted to bury these bodies. However, they were intimidated and turned away at gunpoint by the Vanni Tigers. Arumugam, a villager from

Kathiraveli, reported to the Jaffna Monitor that the Vanni Tigers would not allow the villagers to cremate the bodies. As the bodies began to decay and emit a horrible stench, the Vanni Tigers continued to prohibit cremation. After several days and many confrontations, the Vanni Tigers finally allowed the villagers to bury the bodies. Visibly saddened and exhausted, Arumugam told us in a voice heavy with grief that he and his team alone buried around 80 bodies of the Eastern fighters.

Almost all the commanders, including Karuna Amman, had no intention of fighting the Vanni Tigers, as they lacked motivation and were not mentally prepared for confrontations with those they considered their own brothers. Many commanders, such as Jimkelly Thatha, Robert, and Jeyam, fled to Colombo, where they lived in hiding without any arms, hoping to go abroad. Meanwhile, the Vanni LTTE cunningly lured Jimkelly Thatha, Robert, and a few others back to Batticaloa and horrifically killed them. Subsequently, the LTTE leadership launched a gruesome campaign against those who refused to return. Many Eastern fighters who refused were brutally gunned down by the Vanni Tigers in the heart of Colombo, with some being killed right in front of visa agents' offices.

At this juncture, a harrowing episode unfolded in Kottawa, a significant suburb of Colombo, marked by a cunning strategy typical of Pottu Amman that would forever alter the history of the LTTE. Fourteen distinguished Eastern commanders and fighters, including Pillayan, Castro, Kuganesan, Arbaran, Kesavan Master, Ruben, Arvalan, and Riyaseelen, sought refuge in a residence while they prepared to apply for visas, hoping to leave the country.

In the absence of Pillayan, Mark, and four others, a fellow fighter named Thamanan,

acting on orders from the Vanni Tigers, administered poison to the group. Following this act of treachery, Pottu Amman's hit squad stormed the house and brutally executed seven of the Eastern fighters in their beds. Thamanan, the perpetrator of this cold-blooded poisoning, still resides in Santhiveli, Batticaloa.

The Kottawa poisoning murder indeed marked a turning point in the history of the LTTE. After this incident, the Eastern fighters became acutely aware that the LTTE leadership would neither allow them to live peacefully nor permit them to go abroad. Feeling as if Pottu Amman's men would hunt them forever if they did not retaliate, they told the Jaffna Monitor that they decided enough was enough. Regrouping with renewed resolve, they returned to the East and launched fierce attacks on the Vanni Tigers.

Now imbued with a renewed sense of motivation and a clear vision to expel the Vanni Tigers from Eastern soil, these fighters engaged with unprecedented ferocity.

The initial offensive was launched on Ayithiya Malai near Unnichaikulam, masterfully orchestrated by Pillaiyan and Tumilan's team. By 2007, the Eastern province was declared free of Tiger presence, marking a significant shift in the conflict's dynamics.

A former Eastern fighter poignantly reflected on the LTTE's downfall, attributing it to the leadership's inability to handle dissent and differing opinions wisely. "The LTTE lost a loyal province that had consistently supplied thousands of fighters," he said. "Whenever there was trouble in the North, we Eastern

fighters were there, winning battles for our leader Prabhakaran. But when he faced his darkest hour in early 2009, there were no Eastern fighters to come to his aid."

He continued, his voice laden with sorrow and regret, "The Tiger leadership's arrogance and senseless actions on Eastern soil alienated a remarkable group of fighters who had once been fiercely loyal to them. And so, they met their end in May 2009, abandoned like corpses in the marshes of Nanthi Kadal.



Savithiri, the then commander of the Mathana Regiment

Former Visalakan Brigade Commander Jeyam narrated an intriguing tale. He said, "This is how the LTTE leadership operated from its inception, and it was their SOP (standard operating procedure). They annihilated anyone who was not aligned with them or who slightly differed from them. LTTE leadership branded other Tamil militant organizations, who also took arms for the same course, and their fighters as traitors and mercilessly hunted down them, and nobody raised their voice.

He says Initially, people were not supportive of the LTTE's ruthless killings, but over time, they began to support them. This gave the LTTE leadership a sense of impunity, believing that no matter whom they killed or what they did, nobody could challenge them.

He concluded with a deep smile, 'The Vanni Tigers thought they could kill us in the same way, but they failed to understand that we were also Tigers.'

These aerial view photos and the cover photos were taken by J. SATHU



The second from the left, Theenthamil, a prominent LTTE woman leader from the east, and on the far left, Savithiri, commander of the Mathana Regiment

How Could We Battle Our Own Siblings?:

Exclusive Interview with **Mathana Regiment's Commander**



BY:
Our Special Correspondent

Savithiri, once the commander of the Mathana Regiment—a unit of female fighters from the East—was stationed along the Batticaloa side of the Verugal River during the attack by the Vanni Tigers on the Eastern Tigers. She was one of the initial casualties, sustaining injuries early in the conflict. Today, Savithiri lives a tranquil life with her husband and children. Initially

reluctant to revisit the painful memories of the Verugal massacre, which still brings her immense pain, she eventually consented to share her experiences after considerable persuasion. Here is our conversation with her.

Were you aware beforehand that the Vanni Tigers might launch an attack?

No, there were no prior indications of an impending attack, nor had we received instructions on how to respond. The attack caught us completely off guard. Additionally, the supposed divide between the Vanni Tigers and Eastern Tigers didn't exist; we were united, fighting for a common dream. As for myself and the other fighters in my regiment, we were fully committed to our cause. We had joined the struggle for Tamil Eelam, placing our complete trust in our leader, Prabhakaran.

Even those positioned across the Verugal River who came to attack us were our kin; among our attackers were our relatives and friends—cousins, nieces, and nephews. We saw no distinction between fighters from the East and the North. It never crossed our minds that they might attack us or how we would defend against such an assault.

How could we possibly engage in battle with our own siblings? How could we bring ourselves to attack them?

Were any preemptive measures taken in anticipation of the attack?

No preemptive measures were taken. The possibility of an attack being ordered against our own affiliates was beyond our expectations, and consequently, we were unprepared for either an offensive or defensive response.

Why was your regiment positioned along the banks of the Verugal River? Some journalists and writers have suggested that eastern fighters, including your unit, were deployed by Karuna Amman to potentially engage the Vanni Tigers should they attempt to cross the river.

Those reports are entirely inaccurate and speculative. It is standard practice for our units to spend one to two months in the Vakarai and Verugal areas strictly for training purposes. Although we often met with family members during these periods, our presence in these locations focused solely on training. There were no intentions or preparations for combat during our stay.

Did the Vanni Tigers stationed on the other side of the Verugal River communicate with your regiment?

Yes, they would communicate. We all viewed ourselves as brothers and sisters. Those fighters would casually cross the river to chat with us. We often played volleyball together. Even the day before the attack began, the Tigers across the Verugal River joined us for volleyball and shared the meal we had prepared at our camp. We harboured no suspicions at all. Given our shared language, ethnicity, organizational affiliation, and common cause, it was difficult to entertain any doubts about them.

How many female fighters were there under your command?

In my command, there were 450 female fighters from 3 companies. Out of them, 200 fighters went to Verugal for training. The others remained in Tharavai.



Karuna Amman alongside his Eastern female fighters

What kind of training was provided in Verugal?

Regular combat training and physical strengthening exercises were provided.

What happened in the early morning of April 10th, 2004?

They launched an invasion, and I was one of the initial victims. My memories are fragmented as the first shots fired targeted me directly; one of the assailants shot me at point-blank range in the thigh, shattering my leg. This assault was clearly aimed at incapacitating my command. As the gunfire continued, I managed to call for assistance from Jayam Anna, my senior in the LTTE ranks, before losing consciousness. After that, I fainted and had no recollection of the events that followed.

Did they shoot you with the intention to kill?

I can't say for sure. Those who shot me at point-blank range in the thigh could have aimed at my head as well. I believe they hit me to incapacitate my command and destabilize our forces. Even if they had spared me, I wouldn't have been able to order an attack on them. How can one attack their own brothers?

But those who attacked, or those who gave the command, did not share your sentiments, did they?

Regardless, they are still my brothers. To this day, that's how I see them. I hold no anger towards them. We ate together, and we shared the same dream, Tamil Eelam. And we were fighting for our leader, Prabhakaran.

But they ruthlessly killed many innocent girls from your regiment, didn't they?

That reflects their moral standards, and this is mine. We all joined the fight driven by the



Lt. Col. Mathana (Nagenthirama Karunathevi), a key commander in the Anparasi Regiment, was killed in action in 1997. The Mathana Brigade was named in her honor.

same high ideals.

How many female fighters from the Eastern unit were casualties in the Verugal massacre?

As I was unconscious, I do not have the exact details. However, I was later informed that scores of innocent fighters were killed.

Don't you feel any anger towards the person who shot you in the thigh?

No, I do not.

Have you identified the person who shot you?

Yes, I have identified him, but I prefer not to disclose his name. He is no longer alive.

Who saved you?

I was saved by the girls who were with me and

Jayam Anna.

There are reports that the bodies of some female fighters from the Eastern forces were left in a dishevelled state with torn clothes, insulted in unimaginable ways by the Vanni Tigers. Can you confirm if this is true?

I do not have direct knowledge of these incidents as I was hospitalized at the time. The local people of Kathiraveli, who buried the bodies of our fighters, have made these claims. Visitors who came to see me in the hospital shared these details in distressing conversations. However, I cannot confirm their accuracy since I did not witness the events.

How many months were you in the hospital?

I was in the Batticaloa hospital for eight months.

Did Pottu Amman's death squad come looking for you?

Due to heavy police security, they were unable to visit me in the hospital. However, they came to my home and urged my family to relay a message that I should meet them as soon as possible. I informed them that I was unable to come. After being discharged from the hospital, I chose not to visit anyone and stayed at home, remaining neutral and not taking any sides.

Were you aware of the potential conflict with the Vanni Tigers arising from Karuna Amman's disagreement with Prabhakaran?

No, we were not aware. Karuna Amman spoke



Mathana Regiment

to me just a few days ago, and even then, he did not mention anything about an imminent attack from the Vanni Tigers.

Did you attend the meeting called by Karuna Amman to discuss the rights and representation of eastern fighters with the eastern commanders?

Yes, I attended that meeting. During the discussion, Karuna Amman highlighted the denial of our rights and representation by the LTTE leadership. However, he did not mention any plans to engage in combat with the Vanni Tigers. Additionally, there was no suggestion of an imminent attack by the Vanni Tigers, nor did he outline any strategies for defence or offence in the event of such an attack.

It is reported that Karuna Amman deliberately positioned eastern

regiments along the banks of the Verugal River in preparation for combat with Vanni Tigers. Is this true?

No, Karuna Amman did not instruct commanders, including myself, to prepare for combat. Furthermore, none of the ordinary fighters from our side were aware of such preparations, and almost all of them did not even know there was a minor problem between Karuna Amman and the LTTE leadership. Therefore, it is inaccurate to suggest that he was preparing for combat. It's utter nonsense.

When the war ended in 2009 and ultimately led to the killing of Prabhakaran, what was your state of mind?

I was filled with sadness and devastation.

What was your emotional state when Colonel Ramesh, who was implicated in the Verugal massacres, surrendered to the military and was killed?

It was extremely distressing to witness Colonel Ramesh being brutally tortured by the military. I know he was one of those who orchestrated the killings in Verugal and across the East, but it was profoundly difficult for me to see someone I regarded as an elder brother subjected to such inhumane treatment.

Is it true that Colonel Ramesh issued the orders to shoot and burn key eastern commanders who surrendered to the Vanni Tigers, including figures like Jimkali Thatha, Thirumal, Robert, and 15 other prominent commanders at Panchimarathadi?

Yes, he did issue those orders. I perceived it as Ramesh Annan facing the consequences of his actions. Despite this, I felt neither anger nor sorrow towards him; he was someone I had known as a brother.

But, Colonel Ramesh alone could not have made the decision to execute and burn the key commanders. The LTTE's structure wouldn't allow him to make such profound decisions alone, could it?

Definitely not. Such an order had to come from higher up in the hierarchy.



Who ordered that execution?

Given the structure of the LTTE, such a significant decision would have had to come from the top leadership. It was ordered by the leader, Prabhakaran, and passed through the intelligence wing's chief, Pottu Amman.

Do you agree with Karuna Amman's assertion that the Vanni leadership neglected the eastern fighters by not providing the necessary resources and recognition?

Yes, it is true. The eastern fighters were neglected by the LTTE leadership. Additionally, whenever we achieved victories in Vanni after sacrificing our lives, those victories were often claimed by the northern commanders, who were then given the honour of raising the flag.

Mainland LTTE Were the Real Quislings: Karuna Amman



BY:

Kaniyan Pungundran

கணியன் பூங்குன்றன்

Did you anticipate that the Vanni Tigers would cross the Verugal River and launch an attack on the eastern LTTE fighters?

After breaking away from the main faction of the LTTE, I wrote earnest letters to our leader, Prabhakaran, and sent them through the ICRC. In my letters, I appealed to him, 'The Eastern fighters have repeatedly saved the lives of you and your closest allies; hundreds from the East have embraced martyrdom in your defense, and around 5,000 of them fell in the northern battles. I have explained why these fighters should not be harmed. We seek no conflict,' I wrote, and I also mentioned that I am sending these fighters home to save them.

I subtly conveyed that the rift was a personal grievance between Prabhakaran and myself, underscoring that the Eastern fighters were innocent in this separation. Regrettably, under the influence of commanders like Pottu Amman, Prabhakaran made the grievous error of declaring war on the Eastern fighters.





Aerial view of the Verugal River

Coming back to your question. Indeed, I was aware that the Vanni Tigers were advancing toward the Verugal bank, yet I had not foreseen an assault. The Vanni Tigers brokered a deal with the Sri Lankan Army—their lifelong adversaries—to orchestrate an attack on their own eastern fighters. The Vanni LTTE shipped the weapons by sea from Semmalai in Mullaitivu to Mutur in Trincomalee, aided by the Sri Lankan navy. As the weapons journeyed across the sea, between 700-800 Vanni LTTE fighters traveled by bus to the Trincomalee side of the Verugal River, navigating through numerous army checkpoints and areas under government control, clearly with the army's blessings.

In this scheme, the LTTE leadership collaborated closely with the Sri Lankan Army, effectively acting as a 'Quislings Group' or

'Ottukkuzhu.' Ironically, they labelled us as the 'Ottukkuzhu,' accusing us of colluding with the army when, in fact, their own actions were those of a true Quislings Group.

I do not blame the army; as our adversaries, they naturally preferred to see both factions of the LTTE weakened by internal conflict.

I was fully cognizant of the unfolding events. Even the day before the Verugal attack, I visited the riverbank and engaged with the Vanni Tigers stationed across the river. I questioned them earnestly, "Why are you coming? Why must we engage in fratricidal fighting and die?"

What subsequently occurred after your conversation with the Vanni Tigers?



A tragic event unfolded the very next day. They launched a sudden and brutal attack at midnight on the women's regiment stationed there, resulting in the senseless loss of approximately 40 innocent female fighters. At that moment, I was actively engaged in sending my Eastern fighters back to their homes after having them lay down their weapons in a bid for peace.

While we were in the process of demobilizing,

the Vanni LTTE forces crossed the river and mercilessly targeted the women fighters, catching us completely off guard. My intention was never to engage in further violence; the fratricidal killings that plagued our land following the departure of the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) from Sri Lankan soil had left a deep scar on my conscience. After the IPKF left, the LTTE's violent purges claimed the lives of about 8,000 Tamil youths from various militant factions, predominantly those associated with the Tamil National Army (TNA).

Having witnessed and been a part of such horrors, I was determined to prevent any further bloodshed among our people. That resolve led me to ensure that my fighters were sent home safely after they had abandoned their arms.

The Eastern fighters and commanders stationed at the Verugal River told us that you should have given them instructions on how to conduct offence or defence when attacked...



Actually, I did not give any instructions, and I also had not anticipated that they would attack us. I knew they came with weapons and in large numbers, but I never thought they would launch a military attack against us. I also informed the LTTE leadership that if they came to attack us, I would not order a retaliation; instead, I wrote that I would send my fighters back home.

When did you send your Eastern fighters home? After the Vanni Tigers launched their attack or before that?

I had begun sending my Eastern fighters home before the Vanni Tigers attacked us on April 10, 2004. By the next day, April 11, I planned to send all fighters home, having already called a meeting with Eastern commanders like Jimkelly Thatha and Robert. The strategy was to send ordinary fighters home while keeping key commanders with me to take abroad, as they were under threat from the LTTE leadership.

Who led the invasion from the North to the East?

The invasion was meticulously planned. The primary force was the Charles Antony Regiment, led by Nagulan, who targeted us. Banu served as the overall commander of this operation. Eastern commander Ramesh was also involved with them. Nagulan, who is still alive, committed numerous atrocities in the Eastern region during this time.

Why did you not attack? Did your Eastern fighters have the ability to fight back against the Vanni LTTE?

We had the manpower and resources to retaliate

against the Vanni Tigers. Had we launched an attack, it would have been a straightforward task. Under my command, 6,000 fighters were trained to follow my directives and those of my Eastern commanders. Our strength wasn't limited to manpower alone; we also had significant weaponry at our disposal. Among us were battle-hardened, experienced fighters and commanders who had participated in the Jeyasikkuru battle. Had I ordered a counterattack, they would have crushed the opposition in hours. We could have driven them all the way to Muthur.

However, I was firmly opposed to a fratricidal war. The commanders who led the attack against us, such as Banu and Nagulan from the Charles Antony Regiment, were not seasoned fighters. They were the type who might have fled had we struck back. We have seen these commanders' true valour and skill in the final battle (laughs).

Did every Eastern commander accept your decision to split with the mainland LTTE?

Before publicly announcing my decision, I convened a meeting with key commanders from the Eastern region. I shared my concerns that the ongoing conflict was stagnating and that the LTTE leadership was not genuinely committed to its peace negotiations with the Sri Lankan government. I warned them that Leader Prabhakaran would likely break the ceasefire soon and that hostilities would likely resume.

I further explained that he was not open to considering any solutions, including federalism or anything similar. I told my commanders that I was unwilling to lose more of my fighters and emphasized how the LTTE leadership had

failed to properly respect and represent Eastern fighters.

Furthermore, I declared that anyone who wished to remain with me was welcome, and those who preferred to stay with the LTTE leadership could go to Vanni.

Following this declaration, Eastern commanders like Ramesh, Karikalan, Prabha, and a few others chose to leave for Vanni. I allowed them to go peacefully; I did not stop or attack them, as I did not intend to engage in combat with the Vanni Tigers.

What was your strategy at that time?

My primary objective was to safely send the fighters back to their homes. While my commanders voiced concerns about my personal security, I reassured them that I was capable of protecting myself. More importantly, I was committed to ensuring the safety of my commanders.

I requested they join me in Colombo, where I intended to negotiate with the Sri Lankan government. Recognizing the dangers they faced, my ultimate goal was to arrange for my commanders to go abroad, as they were likely to be prime targets for the LTTE leadership.

About 35 to 40 important Eastern commanders accompanied me to Colombo. However, during our stay, Pottu Amman and his associates contacted the commanders via phone. They spoke in soothing, persuasive tones, reminding them of the greater cause we all had once fought for. They implored, 'Why are you leaving us?' and assured them that leader Prabhakaran had granted them amnesty, inviting them to return freely to Batticaloa. Convinced by these reassurances, commanders, including Robert,



Jimkelly Thatha, Visu Thurai, and a few others—resulting in 18 key LTTE commanders—decided to return to Batticaloa.

Tragically, upon their return, they were deceitfully arrested and met with gruesome fates. For example, Robert and Jimkelly Thatha were horrifically tied to a tree, doused with kerosene, and burned alive by Charles Antony Brigade Commander Nagulan—a right-hand man of Pottu Amman—who now resides in the Jaffna Neerveli area and has taken up farming after surrendering to the military in the last war.

How do you view these killings?

These killings represent the utmost betrayal. When I, Karuna Amman, decided to split, the LTTE leadership dismissed my actions, claiming that I was merely one individual and that the Eastern LTTE fighters were distinct from me. They also claimed that my departure would not impact their struggle.

However, the grim fate of those Eastern



From left to right - Robert, Castro, and Karuna Amman

commanders who surrendered to the Vanni Tigers, lured by their seemingly sincere promises, tells a different story. None were spared; each commander was mercilessly executed. Had those who surrendered survived, it might have suggested that my actions were traitorous, and even my own conscience would have tormented me. However, the brutal extermination of those who surrendered only affirmed my stance and clearly vindicated me.

Among those lost were highly regarded commanders of both genders, including Saali, Theentamil, Premini, Jimkalli Thatha, and Robert—heroes of the Jeyasikkuru battle. Other notable figures, such as the political leader Turai, Visu, and Nisam, also suffered tragic fates. Leader Prabhakaran directly ordered these actions.

They returned to the Vanni Tigers, deeply trusting leader Prabhakaran. There was no inherent animosity between them and the leadership, nor among the fighters from different regions. Loyalty would have prevailed until their end. However, the decision of the



Sally alias Nilavini, the then women's political leader of the east, who was later surrendered to mainland LTTE and killed by them



Jimkelly Thaatha, who along with Robert and others, surrendered to the mainland LTTE and was later burned to death at Panchimarathadi

LTTE leadership to execute these individuals starkly illustrates the cruel mindset of the leadership.

There are still accusations that you abandoned your commanders and fighters and escaped. How do you respond to these claims?

Those accusations are unfounded. I prioritized the safety of my forces by sending the ordinary fighters back home, and I took my



Left to right, Nagulan, Pottu Amman, Gopal, Ram, Gaddafi—all prominent LTTE faces. The small child standing with Pottu Amman is his third son, Kallaikannan, who was killed in the war in mid-May 2009

key commanders with me to Colombo to ensure their protection. However, despite my warnings, they were persuaded to return to Batticaloa by the sweet-talking of Pottu Amman and his associates. I explicitly advised them against returning and cautioned them not to trust Pottu Amman.

A few journalists and writers suggest that you intentionally moved your regiments to Verugal to fight with the Vanni Tigers should they cross. How much truth is there in this?

This is absolutely nonsense and an absolute lie. There are many fighters still alive; you can ask them. I never instigated or gave commands to any Eastern fighters to attack the Vanni Tigers. I was very clear that another fratricidal murder should not happen again.

Why were those regiments stationed at the Verugal River?

Stationing regiments at the Verugal River is



Nagulan

standard procedure. The forces deployed on the Batticaloa side of the Verugal River primarily hailed from the Vagarai region; it was their standard post. Additionally, a few regiments were temporarily stationed there for training purposes over several months. If my intention had been to engage the Vanni Tigers in combat, I could have easily deployed my main fighting forces to that location and effectively challenged the Vanni Tigers. However, that was not my objective; I did not wish to escalate the conflict.

Is it true that the female fighters from the Eastern region were sexually assaulted in the Verugal area by the invading Vanni Tigers?

Yes, I have been informed by the people of Kathiraveli about such incidents. They shared distressing accounts of witnessing these atrocities, which spurred the locals to confront the Vanni Tigers with broomsticks in their outrage. I am sure that it was the Vanni Tigers who attacked us and committed these heinous acts.

Do you believe the Vanni Tigers committed these acts?

Yes, I do believe so. They were deployed to the East without any restraint, behaving like wild animals. They were ordered to commit atrocities to crush the Eastern fighters, so it's very likely that they also perpetrated cruel acts against our female fighters.

Has this kind of behaviour occurred in the past, such as the LTTE sexually assaulting female fighters from other militant organizations?

No, never. In the past, any misconduct toward women was met with the severest of penalties, including the death sentence. Leader Prabhakaran and I were very strict on this matter. I believe this is the first time in the history of the LTTE that members have indulged in such cruel sexual violence against women, tragically against their own fighters.

There are claims that the burning incident was orchestrated by Ramesh, a former Eastern commander. How do you respond to this?

No, that claim is incorrect. It was Nagulan, not Ramesh, who orchestrated the burning.

Although Ramesh is Robert's own cousin, his role was different. He spoke persuasively to the commanders, convincing them to return, and then handed them over to Nagulan. The actual act of burning these commanders to death was carried out by Nagulan at an LTTE base located in Panchimarathadi in the Thoppigala forest. Those involved in this heinous act are still alive, and it is possible to meet and speak with them about the incident.

There are opinions that you should have commemorated the Verugal massacre but chose not to. What is your response to this?

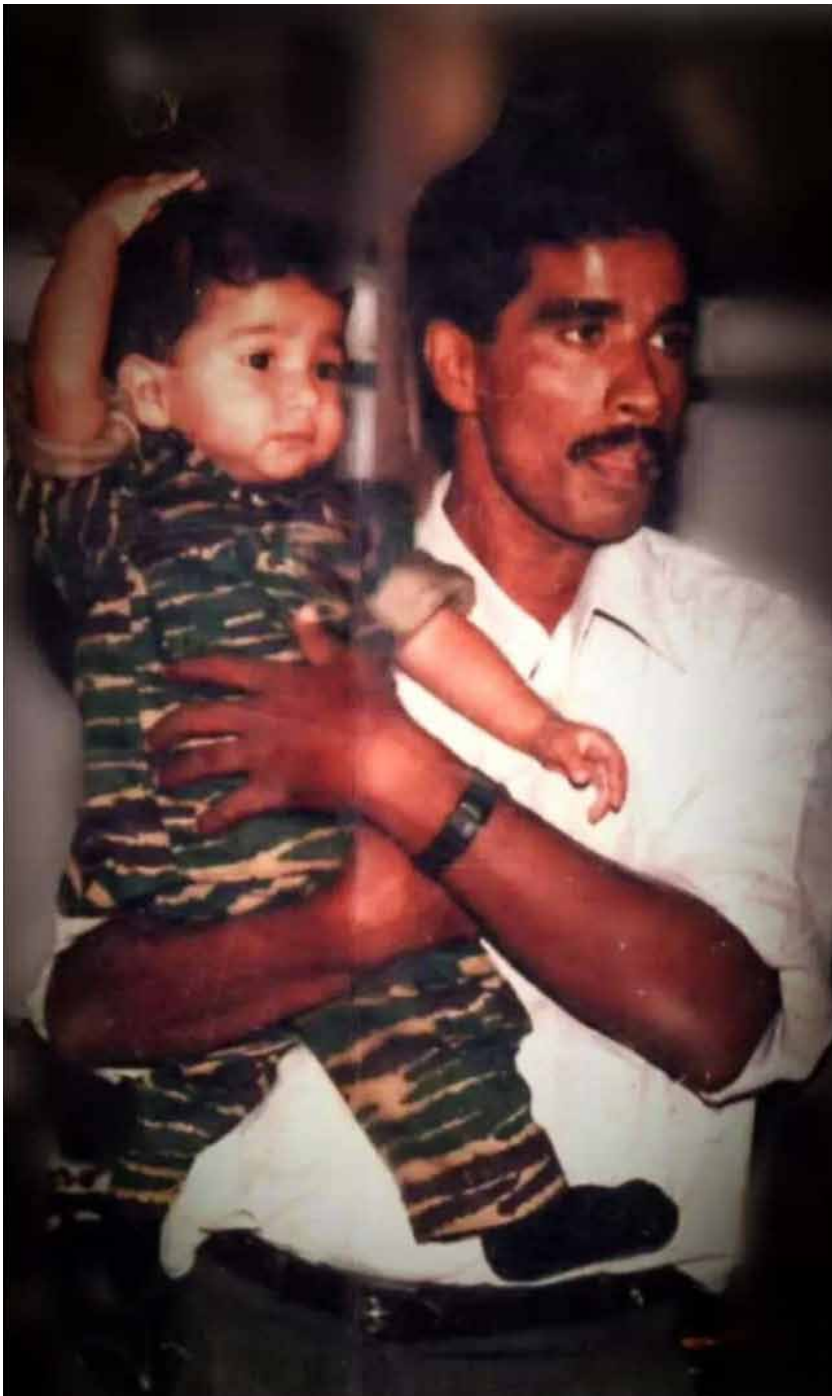
It is undeniable that the fighters who lost their lives at Verugal deserve to be remembered, and I fully acknowledge the importance of commemorating them. However, my hesitation stems from a desire to ensure that such remembrances do not foster division between the Eastern and Northern Tamils. I am very conscious of the potential for such events to instigate hatred between these communities, which would not be productive or beneficial.

The Vanni Tigers did not just strike at Verugal; they also killed almost 500 Eastern LTTE fighters in other parts of the East, and these fighters, too, should be honoured in the future, our party plans to commemorate all LTTE fighters, including those who died at Verugal.

Moreover, it's important to highlight that it was the Vanni Tigers, not us, who perpetrated the fratricidal violence in the East. They collaborated with the Sri Lankan army and navy, leveraging this alliance to attack us.

They Killed My Father

By:
Our Reporter



Karthikan with his father, Thurai

Karthikan was merely 6 years old when his father, Thurai, the former leader of the LTTE's political wing for the Batticaloa district, was summoned for an investigation by Keerthi, the newly appointed intelligence wing chief of Batticaloa and a right-hand man of Pottu Amman. At the time of the split, Thurai was said to have sided with Karuna Amman. Afterwards, it is said that Thurai disassociated from everything, was not involved with Karuna's faction, and did not take sides; he led a relatively peaceful life at his close relative's house. Here's our interview with Karthikan.

Do you remember your father?

I was only six years old when men from the LTTE came to take my father away. They arrived in a van and informed us that they were acting on orders from Keerthi Mama, the intelligence chief of the Batticaloa and Ampara districts. They took my father and Robert mama on April 20th, 2004. The person who came to take my father was named Yogarasa, a member of the LTTE's intelligence wing, who now resides abroad. That was the last time I saw my father. He never returned.

Why was Robert, often regarded as second only to Karuna Amman, with your father?

They were very good friends. Initially, they both supported Karuna Amman because they believed in his claim that the eastern regions were neglected by the LTTE leadership. However, as time went on, they chose not to participate in what they saw as fratricidal killing within the organization. Consequently, they disengaged from active involvement and led peaceful lives at a close relative's house.

Was Colonel Ramesh, who ordered your father's killing, a close relative of yours?

Yes, Colonel Ramesh was my father's cousin. In fact, my father and Robert took refuge at the house of Arumugam, who is actually Ramesh's elder brother.

Was your mother involved with the LTTE?

Yes, my mother was a member of the LTTE's medical unit. She was known within the organization as Malarini, though her real name is Manjula. In fact, after Karuna's split from the LTTE, she persuaded my father to return. She personally took him to Keerthi mama, who reassured her that no harm would come to him.

Why do you still refer to Keerthi as "Mama" (uncle) even though he was implicated in your father's killing?



Karthikan

Keerthi was very close to our family, and I grew up calling him Keerthi "Mama." This term of endearment has stuck with me over the years despite the circumstances surrounding my father's death. The familiarity and the bond from my childhood have persisted in how I address him.

What happened to your father?

He never returned home. It was later revealed that he was among several commanders who were brutally shot and burned to death in Panchi Marathadi.

Keerthi Mama confirmed this tragic outcome to my mother several months after the event.

How many siblings do you have?

We are three siblings. At the time of my father's death, I was 6 years old—I am the only one who can recall memories of my father. My younger brother was 4 years old, and he has only faint memories of our father. My sister was just 1 year old then; she does not remember him at all.

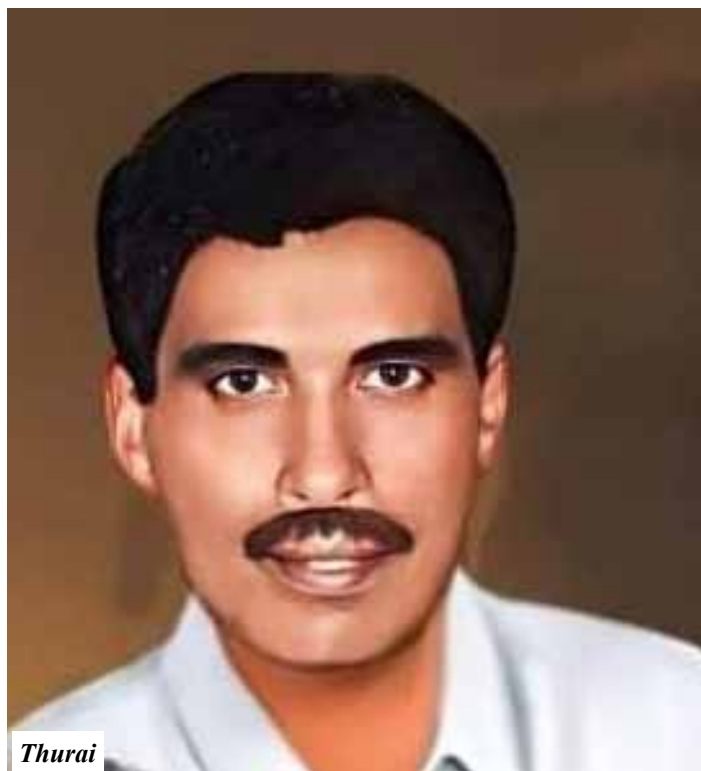
Who ordered the execution?

According to my mother, it was ordered by Colonel Ramesh, the then-commander of the LTTE for the Batticaloa and Ampara districts, who was also a close relative of my father.

After my father's death, one of the individuals present at the site where he was killed came to meet my mother. He apologized and told her that my father, along with other important LTTE commanders, was killed and buried in a large pit created by a backhoe. There are varying accounts of the event: some say he and the other commanders were shot dead and cremated, while others claim they were burned to death.

How did your family manage to continue living after your father's tragic death?

It was months after his arrest that we learned of his death, leaving us in a state of painful uncertainty. My mother



Thurai

endured immense grief. Over time, she found strength and took a job at a hospital, which helped us slowly rebuild our lives and find a way forward through the sorrow.

Do you or your mother harbour any hatred towards those who killed your father or ordered his execution?

Absolutely not. The irony is painful—the very people who took my father from us were once close to him, almost like family. Every day, I grapple with a deep sadness, knowing he's gone, mixed with confusion over my feelings towards them. In my heart, I don't find hatred, only a profound sorrow. This entire ordeal has imprinted on me a crucial lesson: we must do everything in our power to prevent such heart-wrenching, fratricidal violence in the future. We also should not allow the North to dictate what the Easterners should do.



Keerthi

Despite LTTE Leadership's Intent to Destroy Us, We Are Still Rising:

Interview with Pillayan



BY:

Our Special Correspondent

We met with Sivanethurai Chandrakanthan, also known as Pillayan, the leader of the Tamil Makal Viduthalai Pulikal (TMVP) and the State Minister for Rural Road Development of Sri Lanka. His party, TMVP, is at the forefront of commemorating the Verugal massacre annually. Below are excerpts from our interview with him.

Why do you commemorate the Verugal massacre every year?

It has been 20 years since the Verugal massacres took place. It is important for us to reflect on the suffering and sorrow we endured when fleeing Verugal. The invasion by the Vanni Tigers, under orders from LTTE leader Prabhakaran and Intelligence Wing Chief Pottu Amman, forever changed



our lives and the political landscape of the East.

LTTE leadership, Those who once claimed we were of the same race, declared the Northeast united and called us brothers and sisters, ultimately betrayed and killed us. The pain and agony of the Verugal massacre, along with the momentum it spurred, have shaped us into who we are today.

Although the LTTE leadership intended to destroy us, we are still rising, even 20 years later. We remember the Verugal massacre as an event that recalls the pain and suffering of the Eastern fighters and honors those Eastern Tigers who were unjustly killed by the LTTE leadership.

Additionally, this commemoration demonstrates that we have overcome the dominance of the Northern Jaffna mindset and have established the distinct identity of the East.

What do you mean by the dominance of the Northern Jaffna mindset?

I don't blame everyone, but the LTTE leadership had a Jaffna-centric superiority mindset, believing they alone possessed all knowledge. The Eastern Province cooperated with the Northern LTTE, participating diligently in the liberation struggle. However, the Northern leadership believed that the Eastern fighters and people should only listen to their directives.

Most people from the North went abroad, leaving us, the Eastern fighters, to keep the liberation struggle alive. I joined the fight in Vanni in 1993. Like me, thousands from the East traveled north to partake in the struggle.

We campaigned at every intersection in Kilinochchi, calling out to the youth, 'The enemy has entered our territory, he waits to desecrate our land, so come, join us, let us fight together.' Yet, many Northern youths did not heed the call; instead, they paid agencies to take them abroad. As a result, thousands of Eastern youths were compelled to go north and take up arms.

At the Theravil Thuyilum Illam in Kilinochchi, a martyrs' resting place, most of those who lie buried are fighters from the Eastern Province. About 5,000 Eastern provincial fighters have died in the North. Was the LTTE leadership's treatment of us, who left our Eastern homes to fight in the North, justifiable? Was it acceptable? Was it moral?

The political approach led by Karuna Amman differs from yours. However, in 2004, Karuna Amman decided that the Eastern Tigers should separate from the Northern Tigers and operate independently. Was this the right decision?

Before Karuna Amman decided to split from the main LTTE, He discussed the separation with us. I expressed my view that preserving the aspirations of the Eastern Province was essential. I acknowledged his concerns but emphasized the numerous sacrifices we, eastern fighters, had made for the freedom struggle and ethnic liberation. I cautioned him that if news of this Eastern split were to leak to the media, it could be strategically used against us by the enemy, potentially jeopardizing our quest for ethnic liberation. Therefore, I advised that we must strategically secure what is necessary for the Eastern Province.



Pillayan commemorating Verugal massacre victims at an event organized by his political party TMVP on April 10 at Verugal

Although Karuna Amman decided to initiate a split, he was not inclined to engage in conflict with the LTTE leadership or the Northern fighters. He believed that LTTE leader Prabhakaran would send a delegation to negotiate, hoping they could eventually reach an agreement. It is my understanding that Karuna Amman did not anticipate Prabhakaran's decision to order an invasion of the East and target Eastern fighters.

If Karuna Amman had firmly stood by his decision, we could have made significant changes in the Eastern Province over these 20 years. It is also his fault for not working tirelessly for the decision he made.

However, his decision to separate from the mainland LTTE is why the Eastern Province operates independently today. Additionally, his decision saved thousands of eastern provincial fighters. Otherwise, at least another 10,000 eastern fighters would have gone to the North and died. The struggle would have dragged on.

In my opinion, if liberation movements are to achieve their stated dreams, they must fight and secure these goals within a specified period. Similarly, military victories must be converted into political successes. These two crucial aspects were absent in the leadership of the Tigers. Therefore, Karuna Amman's decision to split from the mainland LTTE was correct.

What types of human rights violations occurred against Eastern fighters in Verugal?

On the morning of April 10th, a tragic and brutal attack was carried out by the Vanni Tigers, who invaded Verugal and executed a calculated assault on Eastern fighters. The aggressors surrounded the area, leading to the merciless killing of numerous Eastern fighters. In a particularly egregious violation of human dignity, the bodies of the deceased were left unburied for many days. Furthermore,

the Kathiraveli villagers, who attempted to cremate the bodies, were forcefully sent out at gunpoint, compounding the atrocity with a denial of basic funeral rites.

Further atrocities included the neglect of wounded fighters, whose untreated injuries led to death from infection. Reports also surfaced of female combatants being subjected to severe humiliation and physical torture; they were forcibly disrobed and compelled to stand on scorching sand by the Vanni Male Tigers.

Additionally, in a chilling betrayal, 18 key commanders, including figures known as Jimkelly Thatha and Robert, were deceitfully summoned under the pretense of a call from leader Prabhakaran. This ruse led to their brutal murder; they were shot, and their bodies callously burned.

Why is there a refusal in the North to acknowledge the Verugal massacres, with some even denying that such a massacre ever occurred?

During the times of conflict, numerous massacres took place. We remember and commemorate the massacres perpetrated by the Sri Lankan and Indian armies, such as the July 1983 riots, the Kumudini boat massacre, and the Sathurukondan massacre, among others. However, we often overlook the Verugal massacre, a tragic event where Tamils killed fellow Tamils.

Most notably, much of the Tamil media behaves as if this massacre never happened. How profoundly unjust is this? Approximately 500 Eastern fighters were slain by the Vanni Tigers during the Eastern split, yet no one questions this. No media outlet reports on it. The media maintains a deceitful silence.

We organize this remembrance every year so that future generations will be informed about this massacre. Only then will they truly understand what actually happened, ensuring that they never repeat these fratricidal murders.



Pillayan with Karuna Amman - File Photo

They Killed My COUSIN



Selvanayagam Yoganathan

My name is Selvanayagam Yoganathan, previously known as Pandiyan during my time with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). I am closely related to Robert, a distinguished commander within the LTTE's Eastern Province, renowned for his strategic role in the Elephant Pass army camp assault. Robert, my cousin, is the son of my father's younger sister.

In his role with the LTTE, Robert served as the deputy military leader of the Eastern Province, acting as the second-in-command to Karuna Amman. When Karuna chose to part ways with the LTTE, citing the need to address the neglected issues of the Eastern regions, Robert aligned with him, prioritizing the welfare of the Eastern Province. However, seeking to avoid a fraternal conflict, he relocated to Colombo to escape the conflict triggered by the Vanni Tigers' aggressive incursion into the Eastern territories.

While in Colombo, Robert was approached by military personnel. As a dedicated member of

the LTTE, he sought to avoid any interactions with the army and decided to return to Batticaloa. Upon his return, he reached out to Ramanan and Keerthi, leaders of the LTTE's intelligence wing in Batticaloa, to secure assurances of safety. They promised him protection on the condition that he remain uninvolved in ongoing conflicts. Accompanied by Thurai, a relative and the then-head of the LTTE's political wing in the Batticaloa district during Karuna Amman's leadership, Robert moved to Kollunulai, a small fishing village in the Eastern district, where he led a peaceful, ordinary life.

However, their peaceful existence was abruptly disrupted when they were summoned to meet Keerthi, the head of the LTTE's Batticaloa district intelligence wing, and they never returned.

Subsequently, I learned of the tragic fate that befell Robert and other prominent Eastern LTTE commanders such as Jimkely Thatha, Vasu, and 15 others. They were ruthlessly

burned to death by the Vanni Tigers at Panchimarathadi. This barbaric act was ordered by Ramesh, who, served as the LTTE's military head of Batticaloa and Ampara districts at the time. The irony lies in the fact that Ramesh was Robert's cousin.

Later, I discovered that they were burned to death by an LTTE guard named Raguvaran, who still resides and owns a bakery in Kottiyavalai. Initially, the LTTE leadership pinned the blame on Ramesh. However, as a member of the LTTE, I understood that Ramesh couldn't have acted alone. The command must have originated from higher echelons, likely stemming from Prabhakaran and transmitted through the LTTE's intelligence wing head, Pottu Amman.

Later, as the Eastern LTTE fighters rallied and struck back against the Vanni Tigers, they captured a Vanni combatant who had been a witness to the horrific events at Panchimarathadi. He revealed that Robert confronted his impending death with remarkable bravery, boldly asking Ramesh to shoot him in the chest so he could meet his end like a warrior. Robert even prophesized Ramesh's own destiny in a chilling forewarning, telling him, “இதுக்கெல்லாம் நீ பதில் சொல்லுவாய்” (“you will have to answer for this”). True to Robert's words, Ramesh met his demise at the hands of the Sri Lankan army, surrendering without resorting to cyanide like a coward.

Witnessing this, I began to believe in karma.

They Took My Brothers Away

By: **Our Reporter**



Kanthasamy Ranjithamalar

name is Kanthasamy Ranjithamalar. My brothers, Prabha (also known by his nom de guerre, Lavamohan in the LTTE) and Thavarasa (known within the LTTE as Pikki), were drawn into the ranks of the LTTE at a tender age, fueled by a fervent yearning for liberation.

Following the schism orchestrated by Karuna Amman, my brothers tragically fell to the Vanni Tigers. One was cruelly snatched from our lives in Vellikantai, and the other suffered a similar fate in Pentukalcenai. Once part of a vibrant family of five siblings, I now mourn the loss of both my brothers. Their violent deaths have etched a permanent scar on my soul. At times, the wish that fate

might have spared just one of them haunts me, longing for a chance to preserve some semblance of our family's legacy. The agony of their absence is a relentless burden that shadows our daily lives.

In the wake of their demise, our family was thrust into overwhelming adversity. With our parents already passed, the mantle of responsibility descended upon me. To this day, haunting questions of justice and fairness gnaw at me—why were my brothers, barely more than children at 17 and 19, brutally ripped from our lives? The gaping void left by their untimely departure is a wound in my heart that time refuses to heal.

A Chronicle of Fratricide: Unpacking the LTTE's Eastern Schism



Prabhakaran



Karuna Amman



BY:

M.R. Stalin Gnanam

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) was established on May 5, 1976. Throughout its 27-year history until 2004, the organization encountered numerous challenges and pressures.

In 1986, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) banned the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organization (TELO). The Tigers' leader in Batticaloa, known as Kadavul, attempted to resolve the issues by negotiating with TELO members instead of resorting to violence. However, contrary to his approach, Prabhakaran, the LTTE's supreme leader, ordered commanders stationed in the East at that time—such as Pottu Amman, Newton, and Kumarappa—to annihilate TELO and its members. Following these orders, the LTTE ruthlessly executed several TELO fighters, prompting Kadavul to leave the organization. This departure initially resulted in a significant setback for the Tigers in the East. Nonetheless, over time, the Tigers regained strength in that region, with eastern fighters ultimately becoming the backbone of the organization in subsequent years.

In 2004, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and its supreme leader, Velupillai Prabhakaran, faced a critical juncture known as the 'Eastern Split.' This internal division presented challenges beyond the military sphere, encompassing deep-seated political and ideological issues that proved insurmountable for the LTTE leader and the organization.

The split was spearheaded by Colonel Karuna, also known as Vinayagamoorthy Muralitharan. A seasoned LTTE figure, Karuna had devoted two decades to the organization and served as the military commander of the Batticaloa and Ampara districts. The schism threatened to alter the course of the conflict, influenced by a complex blend of political, social, historical, and economic factors. Central to the rift were profound ideological disparities between the Tamil communities in the northern and eastern regions, particularly the perceived dominance of Jaffna over eastern interests. This division marked a pivotal moment in the LTTE's history. During this time, the Jayanthan Brigade, a backbone of the LTTE's military successes commanded by Colonel Karuna Amman with about 6,000 fighters, along with other eastern regiments, announced their separation, leading to the Eastern Split.

Following the 2002 peace agreement, the LTTE established its administrative structure, appointing 32 secretaries for various departments, all of whom were exclusively from the Northern Province. These authoritative decisions clearly demonstrated that the Tamil Tigers represented a dominant Jaffna-centric ideology.

At that time of the split, Colonel Karuna Amman wrote a public letter to Prabhakaran. In this letter, he explicitly criticized the Jaffna-

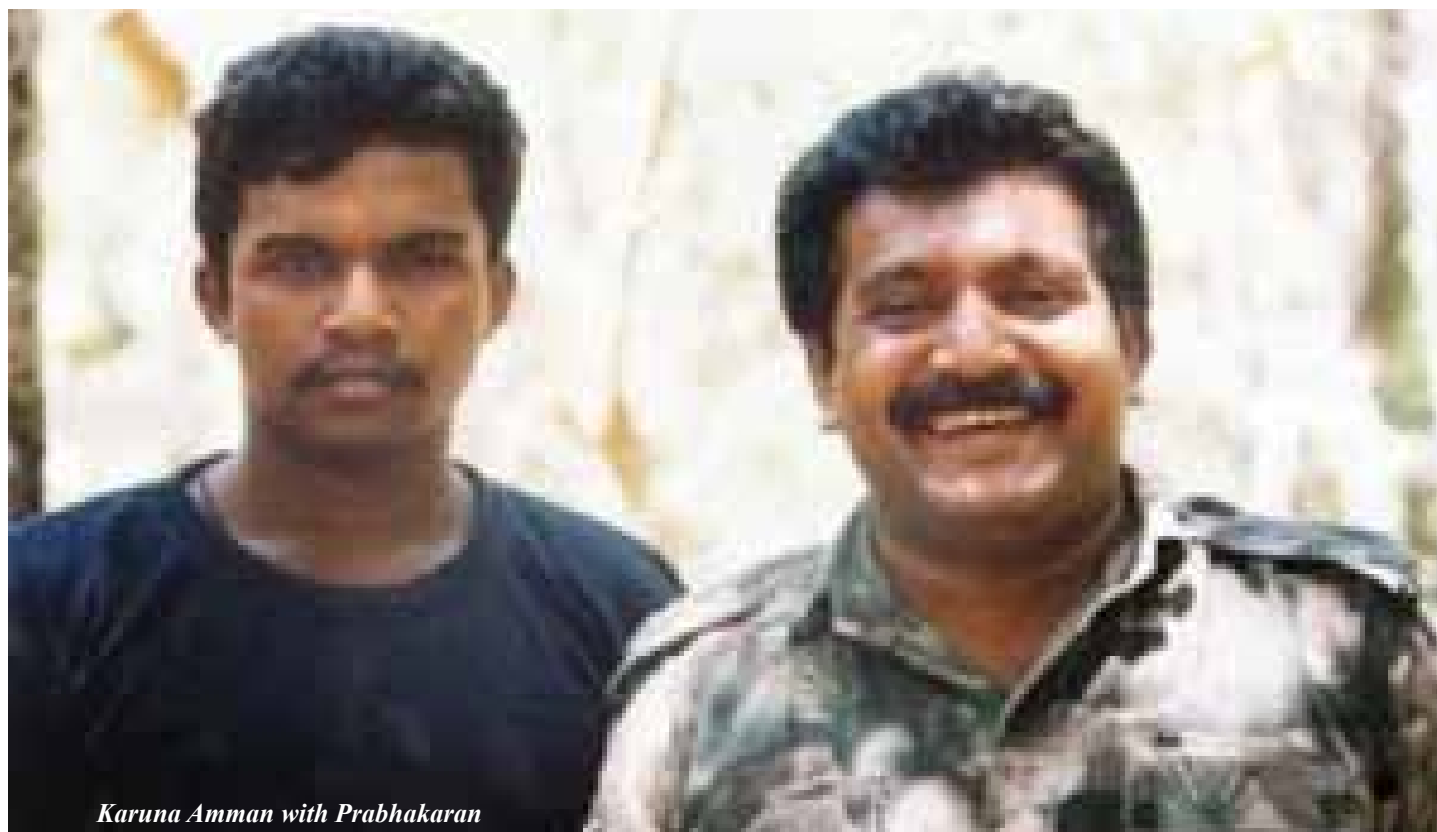
centric approach within the Tigers' structure and firmly stated that a unified administration between the Northern and Eastern Provinces was no longer feasible. He highlighted fourteen key issues as evidence to support his argument.

One of the key points Colonel Karuna emphasized in his letter was the significant loss of life among the fighters from the Batticaloa and Ampara districts during the conflict. He noted that out of the 6,800 fighters who had died in battle, approximately 4,000 had perished on the soils of Jaffna and Vanni. Despite these substantial contributions, none of the 32 administrative leaders appointed by the Tamil Tigers were from Batticaloa or Ampara. This imbalance led Karuna to express a preference for operating directly under Prabhakaran's command rather than under the appointed Tamil Eelam administrators.

Despite the severe issues Colonel Karuna raised, the LTTE's leadership neither provided a responsible answer nor sought a compromise. Instead, they labelled Karuna a traitor to the Tamil Eelam cause and engaged in efforts to divert the direction of the narrative.

The leadership of the Tamil Tigers initiated military operations to oust Colonel Karuna from the East, launching attacks against the Eastern fighters who had historically been central to the organization's strength. This strategy entailed significant military engagements designed to kill Eastern fighters.

The same LTTE leaders who had successfully negotiated with the Sri Lankan government, previously deemed an enemy, found themselves at a communication impasse with their own troops—individuals with whom they had shared meals and combated side by side for years.



Karuna Amman with Prabhakaran

Near the Verugal riverbank on the border of Batticaloa and Trincomalee, a mass killing targeting Eastern fighters was orchestrated by Vanni LTTE commanders Banu and Sornam under the orders of Prabhakaran. Approximately 210 eastern fighters were brutally massacred. The attack made no distinctions between male and female combatants. In a further act of violence, the bodies of female fighters were desecrated; their garments were torn and scattered, leaving the scene in utter disarray.

On April 10, 2004, during the Verugal massacre, a ceasefire was in place, monitored by a Norwegian-led team. Just two days prior to this violent outbreak, the team temporarily withdrew from the Eastern Province. This departure left a critical gap in oversight at a crucial time, thereby indirectly facilitating the conditions that led to the massacre. As designated overseers of the peace, their absence at this pivotal moment also implicates them in enabling the tragedy.

Moreover, questions remain about how the Vanni Tigers were able to transport weapons to the Vakarai region through Omanthai and by sea. It is crucial to determine who authorized these movements. These truths must be exposed to ensure justice for the affected communities. In the current discourse on war crimes, the massacre during the ceasefire raises significant concerns. Given that this atrocity occurred during an international peace agreement, it not only constitutes a war crime but potentially an even more severe violation of international law.

Notably, the Verugal massacre, carried out by the LTTE during the ceasefire, stands out as a pivotal event. This atrocity marked the first major violation that undermined the integrity of the Oslo Accord and the 2002 peace agreement, setting the stage for further escalations and eventual annihilation of the LTTE.

The Eastern Martyrs: Commemorating the Overlooked Victims of Internal Conflict



By:
**Chandrasekaran
Manisekaran**

my view, just as Mullivaikal Remembrance Day is solemnly observed by Sri Lankan Tamils to honor the civilians who perished during the final phase of the Sri Lankan Civil War, and similarly, Martyrs' Day is commemorated on November 27 to remember the fallen LTTE fighters, it is imperative to also recognize the significance of the Verugal massacre.

This tragic event, where the Vanni Tigers targeted their Eastern counterparts, should be marked as a day of remembrance. Commemorating this day serves as a solemn reminder of the internal conflicts' devastating impacts and could foster a spirit of reconciliation and unity among the Tamil community.

This day emphasizes that such brutal killings should never recur in Tamil history. It is not a stance against the people of Jaffna, but rather against the 'Jaffna-centric thinking' of the LTTE leadership, which led to the deaths of our fighters. These individuals were targeted solely because they were from the eastern part of Tamil Eelam.

The massacre reflects the LTTE's cruel mindset and tactics, which significantly alienated Eastern Tamils and fighters from the Vanni group.

Had the Eastern fighters not separated from the Vanni Tigers, the conflict might have continued, potentially



leading to a catastrophe in the East similar to Mullivaikal, with countless innocent lives lost. This division, in fact, served as a critical intervention.

In my view, these Eastern LTTE fighters, killed by the Vanni Tigers, were true martyrs. Their sacrifice exposed the LTTE's true nature, helping us in the East to distance ourselves from the LTTE and Prabhakaran's extremism, which ultimately prevented a large-scale massacre like Mullivaikal in Eastern Sri Lanka.

When these fighters were brutally killed, politicians from the Tamil National Alliance (TNA), whether from the North or the East, remained silent, likely due to fear of Prabhakaran and the LTTE. This silence brought us to a pivotal point where the Eastern people had to determine their own political path, leading to the formation of Eastern Tamil politics and Eastern-centric political parties.

Note: Chandrasekaran Manisekaran is a writer, poet, and the principal of a school in Batticaloa.

They killed my son

My name is Nallathampi Sivakumar, and I reside in the small town of Sittandy. I am a father mourning the irreplaceable loss of my son, Nishanthan, known as Iniyavan, within the LTTE ranks. He was the precious light of my life, born after four daughters, and naturally held an exceptionally tender place in my heart. From the moment he arrived in this world, he was special.

At the tender age of 13, my son was swept into the LTTE in 2003, his youth consumed by the complexities of civil strife. After

Karuna Amman's split from the LTTE, my son returned home, seeking refuge from the conflict. However, the Vanni Tigers relentlessly pursued those loyal to Karuna Amman, and tragically, they targeted my son. Like him, hundreds of other innocent young men—the sons of grieving fathers—fell victim to the violence perpetrated by the Vanni Tigers.

Since that fateful day, every dawn brings an unbearable weight, a constant reminder of the void his absence has created. Our family trudges through each day,



Nallathampi Sivakumar

burdened by the immense sorrow of his loss. Our home, once filled with his laughter and dreams, now echoes with silence and the heartbreak of what could have been. The pain is unrelenting, a sorrow deep and vast as the ocean. We are left to navigate this altered existence, forever changed, forever diminished, by the loss of my beloved son, Nishanthan.



The trade that threatens a legacy



By:

**Dr. Aravinthan
Arunthavanathan**

Mumbai Indians have won five IPL titles, which is a whopping 1/3 championship frequency. This achievement signifies unimaginable excellence in a league of such competition and stature. If winning titles were that easy, other teams would have figured out a way, given the resources at their disposal. But excellence isn't achieved easily. It's built on culture, leadership, and many other factors.

The Wankhede seemed alien as Mumbai came home this season to begin their home leg. As Rajasthan routed Mumbai, it seemed that the team wasn't what it used to be. While many have dissected the causes and shared their views, the whole leadership transition saga boils down to one big question: whether the mighty Mumbai have made a miscalculation. Nobody can tell for sure; only time will tell. However, the

dilemma contains interesting dynamics within itself that are worth pondering.

For the sake of brevity, let's eliminate as many stakeholders as possible. To begin with, Rohit is a legendary skipper. However, in any business, the big boss must move out when the time is right, and this case is no exception. The fans, another critical stakeholder in franchise dynamics, will come to terms with the change despite the apparent animosity at present. They will accept the transition the moment Pandya turns the tide and delivers, which he must do quickly. Moreover, Pandya is at the centre of this entire saga. One cannot fully understand Pandya's role in this equation without access to the minute details of the transaction.

While all those factors are left out for brevity, let us get to the single biggest dilemma Mumbai would be sweating over.

Jasprit Jasbir Singh Bumrah!!

In T20 cricket, it's beyond doubt that batters

grab eyeballs, but it's the bowlers who win you tournaments. Bumrah has been doing this for India and Mumbai with a consistency that is almost unimaginable. He has agreed to be retained at every mega auction, which is noteworthy because no advanced algorithm can predict his value if he were to enter the free market. Bumrah's cryptic social media posts, occurring as many other fast bowlers were snatched up at prices driven by irrational auction dynamics, offer a glimpse into his thoughts on what was unfolding.

Till now, Bumrah has remained loyal to the franchise despite knowing he could potentially shatter any imaginable ceiling if he refused retention and entered the auction. Unlike players like Starc and Cummins, who selectively participate, Bumrah has consistently carried the franchise and demonstrated exceptional results, establishing himself in a league of his own. Given his composed demeanour and his experience leading India in Tests, it's natural that Bumrah would harbour leadership aspirations for the post-Rohit





era. However, now that Mumbai has opted for Hardik over him for some reason and communicated in a manner suggesting that Bumrah's loyalty isn't worthy of leadership, it wouldn't be surprising to see him reconsider his loyalty and enter the free market. If he does, given Mumbai's reliance on big stars, it's hard to imagine how they could afford him at market price. Given his calibre and value, every franchise would vie for Bumrah, potentially delivering a significant jolt to the entire Mumbai Indians ecosystem. Regardless of who comes in or moves out, Mumbai cannot afford to lose Bumrah. Letting him go could have consequences more severe than the benefits of Hardik's return.

However, what's intriguing is how a franchise known for its all-around excellence in both sport and business, like Mumbai, led by the best in the business, could be oblivious to the risks posed by the Hardik trade. Alternatively,

if they are aware, how they plan to mitigate these risks remains a question. The answer isn't straightforward, but it is surely one worth watching out for.

One might think that a single player cannot determine the fate of a team, but when a player like Bumrah—a once-in-many-generations phenomenon—is at risk, it can cause a seismic shift in the fate of any team, let alone Mumbai.

Interesting times lie ahead, and only time will reveal the true value of the Hardik Pandya trade, which could potentially determine whether Mumbai will replicate its past dominance or fade into mediocrity, joining the rest of the pack.

After all, leadership drives excellence and culture, and when a leadership transition is not handled correctly, it can erode these two key pillars of success.

A Call for Journalistic Neutrality in Health Matters



To the Editor of the Jaffna Monitor,

I am writing in response to your recent article regarding the tragic incident involving acupuncture in Jaffna. As an advocate for both responsible journalism and comprehensive healthcare, I feel compelled to address certain aspects of your coverage.

Firstly, it is crucial for the Jaffna Monitor, as a leading voice in Sri Lanka's Tamil regions, to uphold the principle of journalistic neutrality. Given its significant influence on public perception as the only English magazine from the Tamil-speaking areas of Sri Lanka, the handling of sensitive topics is vital. While the incident in question is undoubtedly tragic, it should not be used to cast an unwarranted shadow over the entire practice of acupuncture or alternative medicine. It is important to differentiate between an isolated case of malpractice and the broader field of medicine.

Acupuncture, deeply rooted in traditional Chinese medicine, is a globally recognized and respected medical practice. When administered by licensed and trained professionals, its efficacy and safety are well-documented and acknowledged worldwide, including in countries such as the United States, Germany, Canada, and South Korea. The unfortunate incident in Jaffna seems to stem more from a lack of regulation and practitioner error rather than an inherent flaw in acupuncture itself.

Medical malpractice unfortunately exists across various medical disciplines, including

modern allopathic practices. Maintaining a balanced perspective is crucial; focusing solely on incidents within alternative medicine is not conducive to this. The reporting style in your last issue, particularly regarding the acupuncture-related mistreatment and subsequent death, unfairly casts acupuncture in a negative light, suggesting it's invalid or harmful. This is not an accurate representation. Recognizing the significant role of allopathic medicine in contemporary healthcare is essential, but acknowledging the value of other medical traditions is equally important. Numerous instances have demonstrated how Ayurvedic therapies effectively resolved illnesses that other methods could not. Additionally, I am concerned about the stance of the medical establishment, especially organizations like the Government Medical Officers' Association (GMOA). Their apparent emphasis on suppressing non-allopathic practices is worrying. It appears there is a systematic effort by these entities to target and unjustly discredit alternative medical practices.

If your approach were truly neutral, you would equally highlight instances of negligence in modern medicine, such as the reported case where a young girl tragically lost her arm due to medical malpractice at the Jaffna Teaching Hospital a few months ago. Those responsible for this case, including doctors and nursing staff, are still at large. Why not report on that as well?

The need of the hour is for strict regulatory oversight across all medical practices and heightened public awareness about the qualifications of healthcare providers, regardless of the field. The media can play a crucial role in this regard, advocating for policies and systems that safeguard public health while providing balanced and factual information.

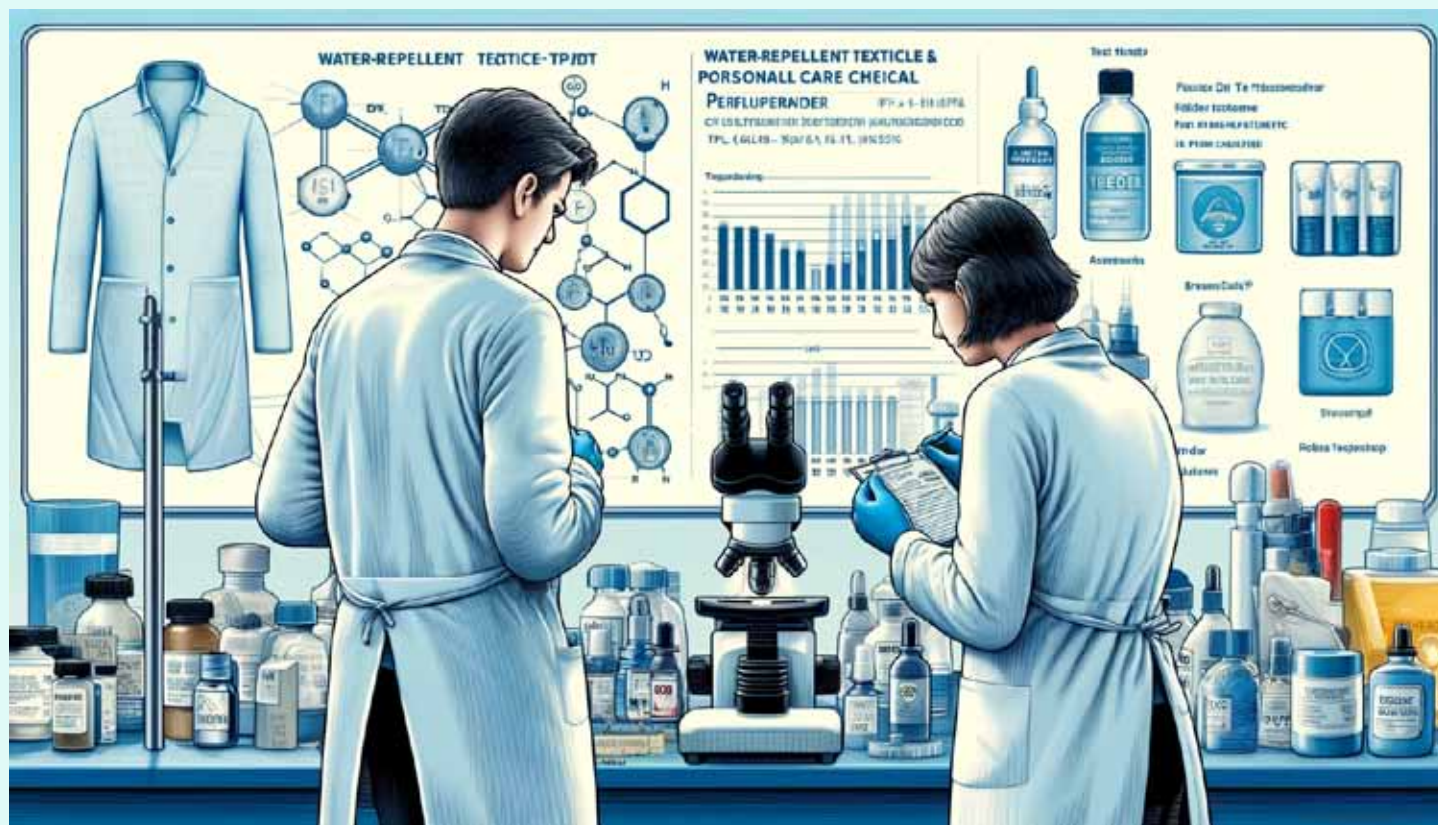
While it is essential to report on public health issues and incidents of medical negligence, it is equally important to do so in a way that informs, educates, and maintains an unbiased stance. The approach should be one of constructive dialogue and advocacy for better healthcare standards rather than inadvertently stigmatizing a particular branch of medicine.

I trust that the Jaffna Monitor will consider these perspectives in future reporting, continuing to serve as a vital source of information and a bastion of responsible journalism.

Sincerely,

M.Ilangumaran

CEJ Raises Alarm Over Hazardous Chemicals in Everyday Products in Sri Lanka



By:
Our Reporter

The Centre for Environmental Justice (CEJ) has sounded the alarm on a significant public health threat in Sri Lanka. In its latest research findings, the CEJ reveals the disturbing presence of Endocrine Disruptive Chemicals (EDCs) in common consumer products, including water-repellent textiles and personal care items.

One of the most concerning findings pertains to the detection of perfluorooctanoic acid (PFDA), a Persistent Organic Pollutant, in water-repellent clothing sold in Sri Lanka. In tests conducted at Charles University in the Czech Republic, an apron and a jacket purchased locally were found to contain PFDA levels of 2.6 and 2.7 parts per billion (ppb) respectively.

The inquiry didn't stop at textiles. At the Wonjin Institute of Environmental and Occupational Health, a variety of personal



care products were examined for nine types of parabens and triclosan, all identified as EDCs. Out of the 30 samples tested, six contained three types of parabens - methylparaben (ranging from 0.07 to 2823.2 µg/g), propylparaben (ranging from 0.03 to 14.20 µg/g), and butylparaben (measuring 75.07 µg/g).

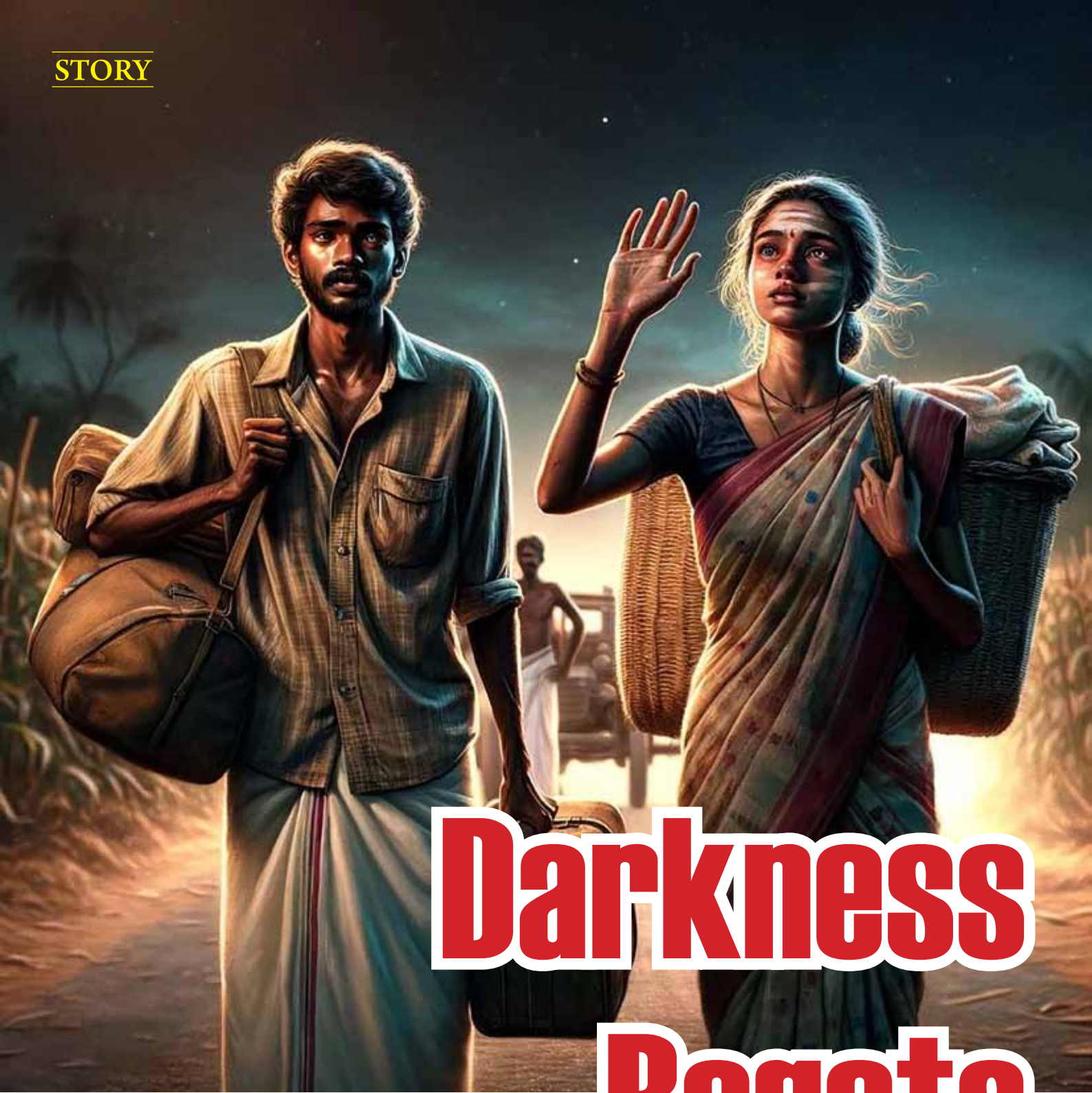
Highlighting the severity of this issue, the CEJ urged local authorities to adopt strategies similar to those of global brands. These companies have taken proactive steps by announcing a ban on per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) in their products.

The CEJ advocates for a comprehensive ban on all PFAS, as opposed to selective restrictions. This call for action is driven by the potential health risks these chemicals pose, as they have been linked to various health problems including hormonal disruptions and increased cancer risk.

A worrying trend identified in the study is the lack of transparency in product labelling. The research highlighted cases where products falsely claimed to be "paraben-free," with one out of six samples tested found to be incorrectly labelled.

In light of these findings, the CEJ is calling for stronger regulatory frameworks and enforcement to ensure consumer safety. This includes improved labelling laws to enhance transparency and allow consumers to make informed choices.

The Sri Lankan government and relevant authorities are yet to respond to these findings. However, the urgency for regulatory action is clear, with public health at stake. The CEJ's report serves as a call to action, not only for policymakers but also for consumers, to be more vigilant about the products they use daily.



Darkness Begets Light

Translated from the original Tamil short story
iruliliruntē oḷi pīrakkiratu (இருளிலிருந்தே
ஒளி பிறக்கிறது) from the 1976 collection of
short stories titled *kōṭukaḷum kōlaṅkalum*
(கோடுகளும் கோலங்களும்)
by Kuppilan Ai. Shanmugan.

Translated by:
Eluttukkiniyan
(எழுத்துக்கினியவன்)

Everyone refers to me as the only child of farmer Sinnappu. It is my great regret to have been born without siblings. But I do have a sibling in a way. She is Maṅgaiyarkkarasi. Whenever she calls out to me, ‘Sathāsivaththaṇṇaṇ,’ it makes me so happy. She is not a sibling who was born of the same parents – but I adore her to death. She is just as fond of me. When I work the well to irrigate the tobacco plants during tobacco season, she would not sit still even if āchchi is delayed in sending me food. She would say, “Poor aṇṇaṇ, he is toiling in this heat,” and sit down to help āchchi to make sure that my food gets sent. Earlier, when she was studying at Ramanathan College, she would buy me M.G.R photos in different new poses and

books with film song lyrics, because she knew I liked them.

She, too, was an only child. Her father was the head teacher in our village school. We all call him the head teacher. Elders like our parents refer to him as ‘*Thiruneerruch chaṭṭampiyār*.’ Always in a white *vēṭṭi* and a ‘national’ shirt, I often see him walking down the road to his school. When I see the three thick bands of *thiruneeru* on his forehead with a big circular sandalwood *poṭṭu* in the middle, and the little bobbing topknot on the back of his head, I am overcome with a devotion, nay, fear as though I want to bring my hands together to worship him. If he happened to see me on the way, his eyes would widen, and he would ask with





a slight smile, “How are you Sathāsivam?” A chill would come over me and my hair would bristle. Maṅgaiyarkkarasi is the darling daughter of such a personality. As much as his presence invoked a mixture of fear and joy in me, I could never tire of looking at her with fondness. When she talks to me, her chatter peppered with ‘Sathāsivaththaṇṇaṇ’ in every other sentence, I would even forget hunger. She would tell me so many stories and regale me with stories of movies featuring M.G.R and Sivaji.

Their new concrete house was just a couple

of doors from ours. But she spent much of her time at our house. During the school holidays, she spent all her time at our house, going to hers only to sleep. If *āchchi* was unwell, she would take over the cooking duties. Otherwise, she would busy herself with helping *āchchi* with her chores. She wouldn’t care if some food was old or new, good or pleasant, even if *āchchi* protested “You aren’t used to this, child,” she would insist on tasting it. If there was some occasion for celebration in our house, she would be running it from the front, chatting jovially with everyone, joking without any inhibition. Countless

are the times when I heard someone say, “*Thiruneerruch chaṭṭampiyār*’s daughter is a good kid.” It made me really really happy. My chest would brim with pride, thinking, ‘She is my *thaṅgachchi*!’

If there was a celebration in their family, she would insist that I go to their house. She knew that I would refuse. I couldn’t bear to be in the proximity of *thiruneerru vāththiār*. Sometimes I wonder how Maṅgaiyarkkarasi tolerated being in his presence. I would ask her what right an illiterate farmer wearing a dirty *vēṭṭi* have to stand next to the god. She would say, “*Aiyā* loves to see you. You are scared for no reason.” Listening to her pleading, I would tear up. But I would be at a loss to figure out how on earth I could mingle with the god-like *vāththiār* or the other white-*vēṭṭi*-clad men who would be visiting their house. “I can’t, *thaṅgachchi*, let me be,” I would beg her in a halting voice. “OK, *aṇṇā*,” she would give up and walk away. I would hide in a corner and cry my heart out until the heavy burden in my chest melts away.

I went to school only till the third grade. When I was in third grade, Maṅgaiyarkkarasi was in kindergarten. I was still in third grade as she progressed through first and second grades. After that I stopped going to school. I no longer wanted to go to school. *Appu* beat me, telling me to go to school. But I didn’t. Even Maṅgaiyarkkarasi asked me to go to school with her. I didn’t. Even the head teacher spoke to me one day, “Why don’t you come back to school? You would need to have a basic education to succeed in life.” I stood mum. Even in those days, I did not open my mouth in his presence. That day, I came home and wept. I didn’t cry when my own *Appu* beat me, telling me to go back to school. But when the head teacher asked me to come back to school, I could not control myself. I cried my heart out. *Āchchi* asked me why I was crying. I didn’t respond. I just cried.

I could never understand what they learned in grades nine and ten. Our Maṅgaiyarkkarasi went to Kandy to study in thirteenth or fourteenth grade! I once asked her, “What do you study in Kandy?” “You wouldn’t understand all that *aṇṇā*,” she said flatly. It is true that I couldn’t understand all that. I do read Tamil newspapers like *Vīrakēsari*, *Thinakaran*, and *īlanādu* haltingly, letter by letter. I can even read the M.G.R. film song lyric books. Maṅgaiyarkkarasi reads big story books. I would love to read big books like that, too. But then how could I, who only went to third grade, read books that someone like Maṅgaiyarkkarasi who went to thirteenth or fourteenth grade reads. I don’t have the time to read anyway. So, I never figured out what they learn in grades thirteen or fourteen.”

For a while, I thought they learn English in higher classes. But if I could learn to read in Tamil by the time I reached the third grade, then I guess it is enough to study till the sixth grade to be able to read in English. Why then are there grades beyond that? Why did Maṅgaiyarkkarasi go to Kandy to learn.

Once when she was home on vacation, she got a letter in English. I took the letter from the postman and handed it to her. It was filled with squiggly English writing. It looked just like the prescription that the apothecary scribbles in English when I have a running fever. I was thrilled that my *thaṅgachchi*, too, got a letter in English. I couldn’t help grinning as I took the letter to her. She had heard the postman’s bicycle bell and had come out of the house. “Why are you grinning, *aṇṇā*?” she asked as she took the letter from me. I wanted to see her read in English. So, I asked, ‘What does the letter say?’

She curled her lips; “I don’t understand English *aṇṇā*,” she said.

I was totally disappointed. “What did all that big education get you then?” I hissed. She laughed. I couldn’t control my tears. I covered my face and ran into the house to sit in a corner and cry.

I didn’t notice that she had followed me inside. She asked, “Why are you crying, *aṇṇā*?” She wiped my tears, saying that I was a big baby. “You are acting like a little kid,” she mocked me.

I asked, “What are you learning at the university in Kandy, if you are not learning English?” University is the school she goes to in Kandy. “You won’t understand all that *aṇṇā*”, she said. “Why should we learn the language of the white man now that he has left our country?” she asked. “We can do everything in our country using Tamil and Sinhala,” she said.

I didn’t really understand everything she said, I understood only a little. Why should we care about the white men’s language after they have left. We do, after all, write big books in Tamil. So why couldn’t we write little letters in Tamil as well? I didn’t think of all this with my third-grade education. It is my *thaṅgachchi* who is studying in the thirteenth or fourteenth grade who came up with these ideas. When I think about it, what she said makes sense. Perhaps this is what they learn in thirteenth and fourteenth grades.

Apparently, a white man had visited our own fields. Back when the railroad was being laid here, a white man who came to supervise the work had entered our field to help himself to some long beans. My *āchchi*, who was then a young woman, had demanded that the white man pay for the long beans he took. He paid her one rupee and had asked her something in English. *Āchchi* had blushed and ran into the house. Back then, it seemed that one rupee could buy as much as ten measures of rice.

Now that such white men have already left, why do we need English, indeed!

One evening, as dusk was settling in, as I was going to irrigate the fields, carrying a spade, I noticed two pants-clad young men on bicycles hanging around our house. My *thaṅgachchi* was washing clothes at their well. I was incensed: why do these rascals want to ogle at my sister? I walked towards them. One of them said to the other, “Look your bird is here.” The other looked at the well and smiled. For a moment, it looked like my *thaṅgachchi* smiled back at them. How dare they! I glared at the men on bicycles. I was holding a spade. Perhaps that scared them. They took off like bullets and disappeared. Had they stayed, who knows, I might have had reason to use the spade.

That night, the moon was full. I loved to irrigate the fields on full moon nights, drawing water from the well while belting out M.G.R. movie songs. But that night, I was dejected. Did Maṅgaiyarkkarasi smile at those men? It looked like that. But it was dusk. Perhaps she just lifted her head, and I might have misinterpreted it as a smile. She wouldn’t have smiled at strange men. She is *thiruneerruch chaṭṭampiyār*’s daughter, my *thaṅgachchi*. These thoughts rushed through my mind. I felt a lump in my throat, and an irresistible urge to cry.

It was just four or five days ago that she got her results. It seems she has passed her exams. Now she is some V.A. or B.A. it seems. She came running to our house, hopping and skipping all the way, and asked *āchchi*, “Where is ‘Sathāsivaththaṇṇaṇ’?” “Why?” I demanded. “*Aṇṇai*, I have passed the exam. I’m going to give you a gift,” she said. I was thrilled that my *thaṅgachchi* passed the exam. She held out a parcel in her hand but teased me by pulling her hand back when I reached out to take it. I leapt towards her, grabbed the



parcel, and opened it.

I was elated. She is truly my *thaṅgachchi*. I wanted to scoop her up and hug her tightly. But she ran away to āchchi, saying “*Aṇṇan* is still a baby.”

Her gift was a blue terylene shirt. Earlier, before she went off to university, she gave me a yellow terylene shirt. That was the only shirt I had all these days. I don’t usually wear a shirt, except sometimes when I go to the city, riding doubles on bicycles with other field hands to see the late-night show of an M.G.R fight movie.

Sometimes when *thaṅgachchi* was home on vacation from the university, I went to the movies with her. Even if I tried to wriggle out of it, she wouldn’t give up. “How can I go alone to see the movie, *aṇṇā*? I need a male relative to chaperone me. You come with me, I will take care of everything else,” she would say. What could I do? I would clean my yellow terylene shirt and outdoor *vēṭṭi*, put them on and take the bus with her to go see the movie. Otherwise, I don’t take the bus to go anywhere, even to the market.

She knew her way around Jaffna. She would insist that I buy a one-rupee-and-ten-cent ticket. I would flatly refuse. I would buy a

sixty-five-cent ticket to sit in the gallery. Occasionally I would turn around to scan the second-class seats at the back. The last time we went a movie together, a young man seemed to be eyeing *thaṅgachchi*. He looked familiar, but I couldn't place him. People in the city were like that – men and women ogling at one another equally.

When the movie ended, a couple of girls called after *thaṅgachchi*, “Maṅgaiyarkkarasi, Maṅgaiyarkkarasi, Maṅgaiyarkkarasi!” *Thaṅgachchi* introduced me to them, saying, “This is the ‘Sathāsivaththaṇṇaṇ I told you all about.” I was both happy and shy. The girl wearing the yellow sari looked like a good girl; the one with the blue sari was so-so. But the one in the short skirt... *chee*...I was disgusted to even look at her. Her lips were painted red. She laughed, saying “It looks like he came, too.” *Thaṅgachchi* laughed, too. I didn't understand anything, but I didn't like what was going on anyway.

Later, I told *thaṅgachchi* not to be friends with the short-skirt girl. “The yellow sari girl seems to be the good sort. Be friends with her,” I said. Somehow, I seemed to have taken a liking to this yellow-sari girl. She was the right sort.

Sometimes, young men on bicycles came to visit *thaṅgachchi*. She would hang out with them, laughing and joking. She would invite them into her home and serve them tea. The head teacher didn't seem to mind all this!

“You are a girl. You shouldn't hang out with young men,” I admonished her. She laughed out loud. “*Aṇṇai*, you are still a baby. What is wrong with men and women being friends, talking and laughing? Whether that is wrong or not depends on one's mind,” she said. I thought about it later. There is indeed nothing wrong with men and women being friends. Now I understand what they learned in the

thirteenth grade.

Yesterday, when I returned home from the fields in the evening, *thaṅgachchi* looked as if she was going to cry. As soon as she saw me, she started to weep. I couldn't bear to see her cry, she who is always laughing and joking. I felt like crying too. Usually, when I cried, she would tease me asking, “Are you still a baby?” I realized that something bad must have happened to make her so sad. I wiped her tears, held her hands and begged her to tell me why she was crying. She sobbed, saying, “*Aiyā* wants to marry me off.”

I did not understand. A marriage is a happy occasion. I couldn't comprehend why she was crying about the prospect of marriage. “Isn't that a good thing? Why are you crying?” I asked.

She stopped crying and glared at me. “Suppramaṇiam, who teaches at our big school, is the groom,” she said.

I know him. Boys at the big school tell me that he is one of the good teachers; I see him from time to time riding his bicycle. Sometimes he would be softly singing devotional hymns as he pedals. Sometimes he carries big English books. Once he dropped a book while he was riding his bicycle. I was the one who picked it up for him. Like *thaṅgachchi*, he is also a BA or MA or something. He is indeed a good match for Maṅgaiyarkkarasi. Why does she cry?

“He is a good man. A good match for you. Why are you crying, you silly girl? I asked.

She took out a photo from her blouse and thrust it towards me: A tall man wearing long pants and a woman. I wiped my eyes and looked again carefully. The woman in the photo was *thaṅgachchi* indeed! The pair were smiling as they posed for the photo. The

man looked familiar. Oh! It was the boy on a bicycle, ogling at *thaṅgachchi*. He was also the boy who was looking at her in the movie theater. My head was spinning. I felt faint, a lump in my chest, and my eyes clouded over. I felt like crying.

I suppressed the urge to cry. I looked into her eyes and demanded, “Are you really my *thaṅgachchi*?”

She fell at my feet and wept. “If not me, who is your sister?” she demanded. “*Aiyā* asked me, ‘Are you my daughter?’” she wailed. “*Aṇṇai*, I thought you are innocent like a baby. You, too, want to desert me?” she asked. I couldn’t control the urge to cry. “Why then did you do this, *thaṅgachchi*?” I asked.

She wiped her eyes and said “Why, *aṇṇā*? I don’t know why. I liked him, and he liked me. The responsibility of the parents stops when they marry their children off. But we are the ones who have to raise a family together. Don’t we have the wisdom to choose the person with whom we can raise a family? *Aṇṇā*, one should live with the person one loves. *Aiyā* says I must marry the one he chose. But I cannot live without him,” her eyes glistened as she pointed to the photo. I tried my best to steel myself but failed. My eyes were on the verge of crying, too. What she said seemed reasonable. I now understand what they learn in thirteenth and fourteenth grades. Those of us who stopped going to school after the third or fourth grade didn’t think up such novel notions. Only those who studied a lot can. If everyone gets to marry the person they love, ... what a wonderful idea.”

Thaṅgachchi asked me to help her. The young man was apparently from the next village. She wanted me to take a note to him and bring him to her.

I agreed. I am not afraid of the dark. I am

used to irrigating the fields even on moonless nights just based on muscle memory. But it was the thought of *thiruneerru vāththiār* that made me fret.

Well. He did arrive. I was the one who sent him and *thaṅgachchi* off on their way. After all, they are educated. I thought they would go somewhere to lead happy lives together.

Before they left, *thaṅgachchi* fell at my feet. “*Aṇṇā*, you are a god,” she said, “please bless us *aṇṇā*.” I was overcome with embarrassment and joy at the same time. Tears formed. “*Thaṅgachchi*, wherever you end up, live happily,” I said in a plaintive voice.

They walked into the darkness of the night. I was really happy to see *thaṅgachchi*’s joy. At the same time, the thought of *thiruneerru vāththiār* struck fear in my heart.

As she left, *thaṅgachchi* said, “*Aṇṇā*! Don’t worry about *aiyā*; people have to change with the times; *aiyā* will, too. I think his anger will subside with time.”

They left in tears. Why do they cry when they are so happy? They waved, and I stood waving. I stopped only when my arm was sore from all the waving. But my heart was warm.

I am no longer afraid of *thiruneerru vāththiār*. If he confronts me about *thaṅgachchi* eloping with the young man, I will have the guts to stand my ground and defend her. Really, I will.

I could not sleep a wink all night. I kept twisting and turning. The rooster crowed. Birds tweeted. Dawn arrived in tiptoes. As darkness departed, light arrived.

I thought, ‘Now, *thaṅgachchi* would be walking into the light.’

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