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**Erik Solheim:**  
**13th Amendment is a  
Crucial Step Forward  
for the Tamil Quest in  
Sri Lanka**



## Humanitarian *Diaries*

A UN Worker's Exclusive Testimony  
to 'Jaffna Monitor' on the 15th  
Anniversary of Sri Lanka's Brutal  
War Conclusion

03

Editorial



05

Erik Solheim: 13th Amendment is a Crucial Step Forward for the Tamil Quest in Sri Lanka

17

Humanitarian Diaries: A UN Worker's Exclusive Testimony to 'Jaffna Monitor' on the 15th Anniversary of Sri Lanka's Brutal War Conclusion

28

The Foreign Man Who Defied the Sri Lankan Government's Order: Exclusive Interview with Giovanni Porta

32

Heartfelt Send-off for Beloved Principal in Vavuniya

35

Sri Lanka's World Cup Dream Team: Young Talents and Trusted Titans Gear Up

37

We Abducted Hundreds of Children and Forcibly Sent Them to the Frontline

45

Tharshan Selvarajah: Baking His Way to the Olympic Torch Relay

46

The legend of Aravinda De Silva; A reminiscence

49

Anula- story







# Remembrance and Reflections on the End of Conflict

As we approach the anniversary of May 18, 2009, the Jaffna Monitor dedicates this edition to the solemn remembrance of the Sri Lankan Civil War's brutal conclusion. In the poignant words of Indian writer Khushwant Singh from his book *Train to Pakistan*: "According to the Hindus, the Muslims were to blame. According to the Muslims, the Hindus were to blame. The fact is, both sides killed." The same tragic truth applies to the war that culminated on May 18, 2009—both the LTTE and the Sri Lankan government committed atrocities and war crimes.

The Sri Lankan government indiscriminately shelled and bombed its own citizens, while the LTTE, claiming to be the protectors and guardians of Sri Lankan Tamils, shamefully used their own people as human shields and ruthlessly abducted and enlisted innocent Tamil children as young as 12 and 13 years old into their losing war.

The reality of such conflicts is that there are no innocents in the theater of war, only victims and perpetrators on all sides. This edition of the Jaffna Monitor seeks to uncover these harsh truths through exclusive interviews and first-hand accounts that shed new light on the final phase of the Sri Lankan Civil War, and we aim to continue this reporting for our next issue.

We are privileged to present an extensive interview with Erik Solheim, who, during the crucial years, played a pivotal role in Sri Lanka's peace process. Solheim now advises President Ranil Wickremesinghe on climate change initiatives, continuing his commitment to service in different capacities. His insights into the peace negotiations and the final days of the conflict are invaluable for understanding

the complexities of reconciliation and the long road ahead. Moreover, Solheim shared many thoughts not only about the past but also about the present challenges Sri Lanka and the Sri Lankan Tamil community face.

In a particularly moving segment, we hear from "Niththilan", a brave UN worker who breaks his silence for the first time with the Jaffna Monitor. Appointed in September 2008 to lead the UN operations in LTTE-controlled territory, Niththilan faced unimaginable challenges as he directed local staff after international organizations were ordered to evacuate.

This issue also features a poignant interview with a former LTTE child abductor now living abroad. In a candid revelation of his past misdeeds, he expresses deep remorse and reflects on the impact of his actions on himself and others.

Lastly, we bring you the exclusive story of Giovanni Porta, the foreign aid worker who defied the Sri Lankan government's evacuation orders. His testimony provides a unique perspective on the conflict and highlights the international dimension of the war's final days.

Our goal is to ignite a dialogue that promotes understanding, fosters peace, and builds resilience. The Jaffna Monitor remains unwavering in its commitment to truth and transparency, recognizing these values as the foundation of a just and inclusive society.

We do not seek to assign blame. While we cannot change history or bring back the lives lost in the brutal war, we believe that as a community, we can collectively ensure these events do not recur by educating people about what transpired during the conflict.

We invite our readers to engage deeply with these stories, honor the past, and actively contribute to shaping a more peaceful future.

Warm regards,

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

# Erik Solheim: 13th Amendment is a Crucial Step Forward for the Tamil Quest in Sri Lanka

Calls for Unity Among Tamils to  
Support It and Full Government  
Implementation - An Exclusive  
Interview with Jaffna Monitor



By:

our special correspondent

In an exclusive interview with the Jaffna Monitor, Erik Solheim, a key figure in Sri Lanka's peace process and now a climate advisor to the President, delivers an insightful and powerful conversation on the challenges and hopes for the Tamil community and the nation's future. With an unflinching look back at the country's turbulent past and the opportunities



that lie ahead, Solheim calls for unity among Tamils, unwavering support for the 13th Amendment, and a collective push toward peace and prosperity.

**Erik, many recognize your name as soon as it's mentioned in Sri Lanka. Considering your prominent place in the collective memory here, do you see your connection to the country**

**more as an honour, or do you feel it comes with specific responsibilities? How do you view your role in relation to Sri Lanka?**

I definitely see my connection to Sri Lanka as both an honor and a responsibility. In the past, we dedicated considerable effort to mediate peace between the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE, which was an arduous task. This work allowed me to develop enduring

relationships with a diverse group of Tamils, Sinhalese, and Muslims throughout the country—relationships that are both deep and personal and that I continue to maintain.

Now, I feel a pressing responsibility to assist Sri Lanka in overcoming its economic and environmental challenges. Given that Sri Lanka often lacks sufficient international attention, I am committed to supporting the country and raising global awareness of its needs.

**You've had a long-standing connection with Sri Lanka, beginning as a peace negotiator and enduring considerable criticism from various factions. Despite these challenges, you returned 16 years later as an advisor to the President. What sparked your initial involvement with Sri Lanka, and what has motivated you to continue your engagement despite the criticisms?**

My involvement, along with Norway's, in the Sri Lankan peace process began when both the LTTE and the Sri Lankan government recognized the need for a neutral third party to facilitate peace negotiations. Initially, President Chandrika Kumaratunga suggested France as a mediator, but the LTTE opposed this due to her French connections and proficiency in French.

The consensus was that a smaller, more distant country would be preferable to avoid the influence of major global powers like the US, China, or Japan. Norway was chosen due to its reputation for neutrality and peace advocacy, making us suitable mediators. Before this role, my primary regional knowledge was of India,

with very little direct understanding of Sri Lanka.

**As an advisor on climate change to President Ranil, you've undoubtedly felt the intense heat currently impacting Sri Lanka. What are your primary goals in this role, and what outcomes are you aiming to achieve with your portfolio?**

The President recently launched the Tropical Nations Initiative, reflecting his focus on the tropical belt, which is disproportionately affected by climate change. While some northern countries might see benefits from slightly warmer climates in otherwise colder regions, tropical areas face severe challenges like escalated temperatures and more extreme weather events. For instance, tropical regions are prone to cyclones and flooding, similar to the recent events in Pakistan, as well as intense heat waves.

This initiative aims to address these issues head-on. The solutions are clear: we need to rapidly transition to renewable energy sources like solar and wind, promote electric vehicles, and enhance forest conservation. These actions are crucial for mitigating the impact of climate change on tropical nations.

**You've mentioned having a strong working relationship with President Ranil Wickremesinghe and have spoken highly of his leadership. Given this, do you plan to endorse him in the upcoming election?**

Of course, as a foreigner, I will not endorse any



Sri Lankan politician. It's appropriate for foreigners to respect and leave such decisions to the people of Sri Lanka. I am well-acquainted with President Ranil Wickremesinghe from the peace process, and I believe he has performed remarkably in stabilizing the economy during a period of severe crisis marked by skyrocketing inflation and long queues for petrol. My aim is to support Sri Lanka, not to meddle in Sri Lanka's domestic politics. I am committed to working with whoever is elected, be it Ranil, Sajith Premadasa, Anura Kumara Dissanayake, or any other leader.

### **If there is a change in presidency, do you expect to continue in your current position?**

A new administration may ask me and others to continue to support the nation. Indeed, my commitment is to Sri Lanka, not to any individual politician. I am eager to continue helping the country.

### **Given your extensive experience in environmental matters, how do you believe you can influence Sri Lanka's approach to environmental issues?**

I hope to offer advice and share valuable knowledge from other parts of the world, particularly from India and China, two nations with which I frequently work. Both are rapidly advancing, especially in environmental technology. My goal is to help Sri Lanka view environmental and climate challenges as opportunities to create jobs and drive prosperity through green initiatives. Embracing green technologies can lead to significant job creation. For instance, China has been so successful in this regard that 60% of all green technologies in the world are now developed in China alone. It's far ahead of the West. When you purchase a Tesla electric car, the battery is likely made in China, which is half the car's value.

In India, Prime Minister Modi is swiftly advancing renewable energy projects, including green hydrogen. Plans are underway to introduce electric buses and cars, and investments in solar







*Eric Solheim addresses the press in the Northern Province*

energy, including floating solar parks, are occurring daily. Sri Lanka should also seek investment from and partnerships with the US and Europe. However, the most significant opportunities might come from India and China due to their competitive pricing. I am eager to facilitate this exchange of expertise and potentially help establish connections with companies interested in investing in Sri Lanka.

### **Are you suggesting that the Sri Lankan government should view environmental challenges as opportunities rather than problems?**

Exactly. It's about integrating economic development with ecological protection. The old mindset that pits development against the environment is outdated. Today, the question is: How can we go green in a way that both creates jobs and ensures prosperity? This approach redefines progress, marrying economic growth with environmental sustainability.

### **What do you consider to be the most pressing environmental issues locally and globally at the moment?**

Let's start with the local issues. I recently met with all the district commissioners from the Eastern Province, where we identified four major environmental opportunities. First, we're looking to expand solar energy through rooftop installations and larger solar plants. Second, there's a focus on protecting mangroves and forests, with efforts to secure international financial support for these habitats. Third, we aim to transform agriculture gradually into more sustainable practices, utilizing agricultural residues for biofuels rather than making abrupt changes like those attempted under Gotabaya Rajapaksa. Lastly, we are improving waste management to keep the Eastern Province cleaner, which will not only attract more tourists but also enhance the quality of life and health of local residents.



*Eric Solheim with President Ranil Wickremesinghe during his latest visit to Sri Lanka*

**Despite the unfavourable outcomes, do you believe that Gotabaya Rajapaksa's intentions were good when he implemented the ban on chemical fertilizers and aimed for a 100% green agricultural policy using organic fertilizers?**

Yes, I believe his intentions were good. He aimed to transform the environment and address Sri Lanka's debt issues. However, his methods were questionable, to say the least. You can't simply go to a farmer and

say, 'Yesterday, you used chemical fertilizers, but starting today, you will adopt a different method.' That approach simply won't work. Transitioning to organic fertilizers is a long-term process; it cannot be implemented in a single day. It should begin with one farmer who learns the new methods; from there, it should spread to others through mutual learning. That's how it should proceed.

**How would you assess Gotabaya Rajapaksa's performance as President?**





*Norway's Peace Delegation Meets LTTE Leader Prabhakaran and Top Tier Leaders*

There can hardly be any doubt that his time as President was a failure. There was a massive movement against him from all sectors, religious groups, and ethnic communities across Sri Lanka. Tamils, Sinhalese, Muslims, the rich and poor, students and academics, workers and proprietors—everyone demanded his resignation. This was primarily due to his failed economic strategy. For instance, you cannot reduce taxes and simultaneously increase government spending—it simply doesn't add up. However, he was also unlucky, as he became President during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **Do you believe there were any foreign influences involved in the 2022 Sri Lankan protests, commonly referred to as Aragalaya?**

No, that's a common but incorrect belief in Sri Lanka—that there is always someone or something behind everything. In my view, all the major powers—India, China, the United States, and Europe—share the same goal: a prosperous, rapidly developing Sri Lanka that is friendly to everyone. Of course, each nation,

whether it's India or China, would prefer to have closer ties with Sri Lanka. However, overall, Sri Lanka can maintain friendly relations with everyone while still protecting its own interests. But I am certain there were no foreign hands behind the Aragalaya movement. It was a spontaneous movement by the people, driven by desperation due to the economic situation.

### **Who do you hold responsible for the breakdown of the ceasefire that you were actively negotiating?**

I blame Prabhakaran for the end of the ceasefire. He ultimately chose to return to war, unable to commit to a federal settlement. Although he initially accepted the 'Oslo Declaration' in 2002, which advocated federalism, he failed to uphold this commitment. Additionally, I hold the Sri Lankan state responsible, particularly due to the division between the SLFP and the UNP, the two major political parties at the time, which failed to unite for the greater purpose of Sri Lanka, above petty party politics.





*On April 29, 2009, in Colombo, a Sri Lankan army trooper passes by posters accusing British Foreign Minister David Miliband, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, and Norwegian International Development Minister Erik Solheim of supporting terrorism in Sri Lanka. The country continued to resist global demands for a ceasefire, aimed at allowing civilians to escape from the conflict zone to safety.*

## **What percentage of the blame do you assign to the LTTE and the Sri Lankan government for the breakdown of the ceasefire?**

I prefer not to engage in this kind of judgment, even though I understand the question. It's difficult to assess all the factors from the past accurately.

## **But Eric, you were directly involved in those negotiations, right?**

Yes, I was the main negotiator, but it's important to consider the broader context. The book 'To End a Civil War: Norway's Peace Engagement in Sri Lanka' by Mark Salter resonates with my views. I understand the immense suffering experienced by many,

especially the Tamil community, but also the Sinhalese who lost loved ones. There's a strong desire for clarity among those affected—they want to understand what happened, to confirm facts that allow them to honor their loved ones appropriately and move forward. For instance, a widow or someone who lost a spouse under unclear circumstances finds it very difficult to move on without that closure. Therefore, we should focus on shedding light on what happened rather than passing judgment on every act of the past.

**You've faced significant criticism from various factions over time. Sinhala nationalist parties have accused you of sympathizing with the LTTE, while some staunch LTTE supporters blame you for the group's failures**

## **even after the war's conclusion. How do you respond to these accusations, especially given that you initially engaged in the peace process with positive intentions?**

I think it's quite normal. When you attempt to make peace, criticism is inevitable. This is true for peacemakers in every conflict. I was also involved in Nepal, Sudan, and Myanmar. Critics often target those striving for peace because peace requires compromise. If you aim for a 100% win, peace is unattainable; only a military victory is possible, and people are generally unhappy with compromises. Thus, criticism follows.

Indeed, during the war, we were mainly criticized by Sinhala hardliners who accused us of being too lenient with Prabhakaran and overly supportive of the LTTE. Whenever the LTTE appeared on TV, I was often seen alongside Prabhakaran or Anton Balasingham. After the war, some Tamil extremists have similarly claimed that I was responsible for the death of Prabhakaran.

I've been very happy since returning. Now, aside from a few extremists, the vast majority of Sri Lankans, both Tamil and Sinhalese, have welcomed me with open arms.

## **You are one of the very few people who have met Prabhakaran frequently.**

Indeed, I believe I am the foreigner who met him most frequently.

## **How do you perceive him as a person, a military commander, and a leader?**

As a military commander, he was enormously successful for a very long time, building this strong political movement and massive military machinery. He entered the peace process at the peak of his power, signing for peace while still very influential. However, in the last three years of the war, I can see only mistakes from Prabhakaran. He believed he could fight the Sri Lankan army as a conventional force. He was pushed from one defensive position to another, never reaching out for any compromise, settlement, or solution, and taking thousands of Tamils with him into peril. Toward the end of the war, we offered Prabhakaran the opportunity for all the Tamils and the Tiger cadres to be evacuated from the Mullaitivu region, where tens of thousands of Tamils were trapped. We proposed that all LTTE cadres and Tamil civilians be taken out of the war zone by ship.

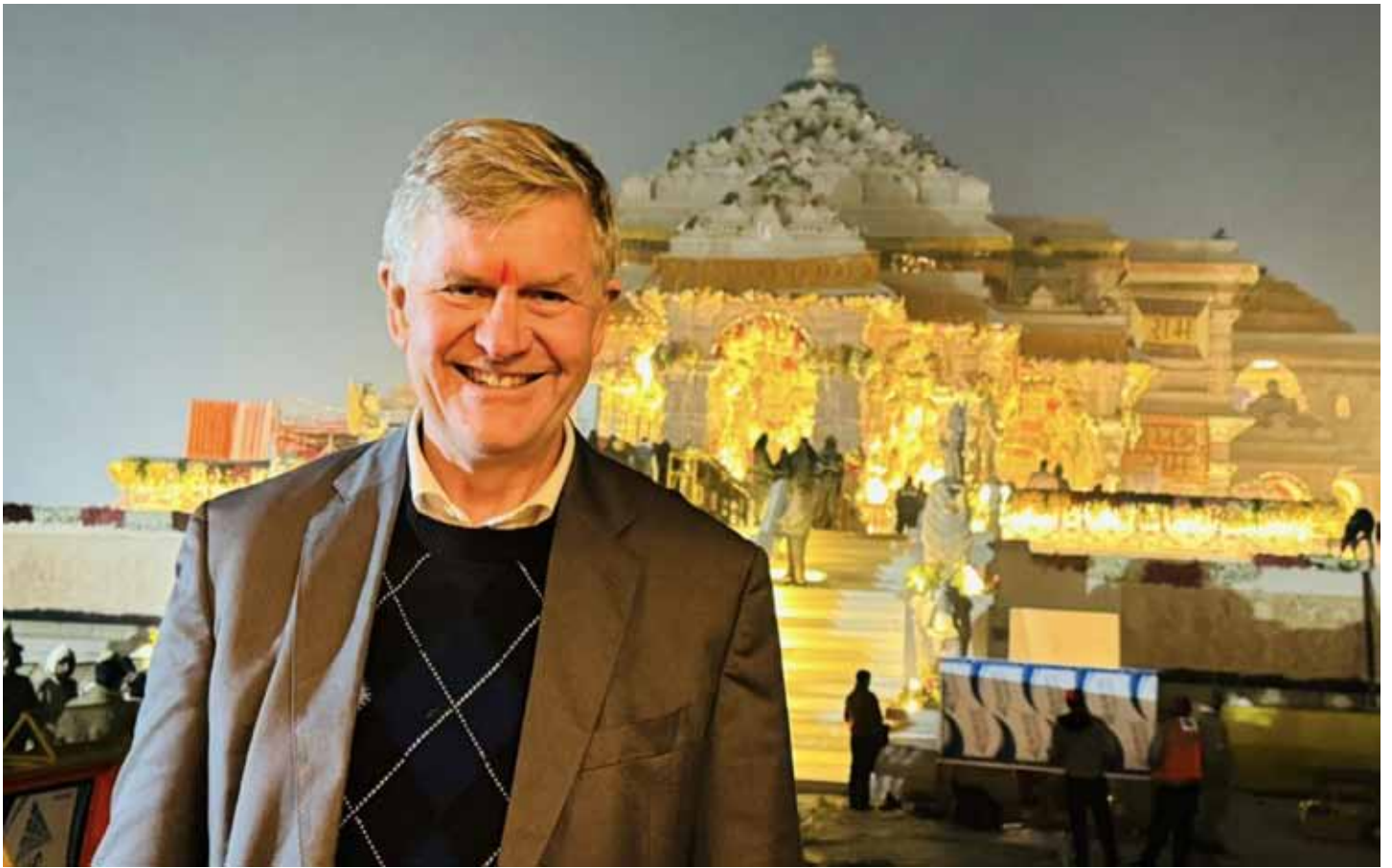
## **To where...?**

To the rest of Sri Lanka, including Colombo, or possibly to other countries where they might receive political asylum. Our proposed plan included registering every LTTE cadre and civilian. This would make it much more difficult to harm or kill them, as international entities would be involved in the registration process. Initially, Prabhakaran said that he would accept this offer, but ultimately, he refused.

## **When this happened.. which month...?**

It was April 2009. We tried to ensure a process to make sure that their lives were all saved through the registration process and evacuation by ship from the east coast. The UN Secretary-General at the time, Ban Ki-moon, was ready to support it, even to visit the LTTE. I was, of course, ready to go to agree





with Prabhakaran. We had backing from India and the United States. There was international support to save the lives of all the Tamil civilians and LTTE cadres, but Prabhakaran sadly at the end refused.

### **So what was Prabhakaran's plan?**

I cannot judge his plan. I don't think I would speculate on that.

### **When did you realize that the LTTE might be defeated?**

India, with its extensive intelligence capabilities in Sri Lanka, consistently advocated for a negotiated peace, maintaining that a military victory was impossible. However, from 2008 onwards, their stance began to shift. Top Indian national security officials indicated that the Sri Lankan army had made significant progress on the ground. The capture of Kilinochchi by government

forces was a very strong sign that a military victory, previously deemed unattainable, might now be within reach. Indian intelligence, which had numerous methods for monitoring the situation, informed us that the Sri Lankan government might indeed achieve a military victory.

### **Do you believe that both parties, the LTTE and the military, committed war crimes?**

Yes, it is absolutely clear that there were war crimes committed by both sides. However, I will refrain from judging individuals or specific incidents. But there's no doubt in my mind about the occurrence of these crimes.

### **Erik, do you view the LTTE predominantly as freedom fighters or as a terrorist organization? I'm**



**asking for your personal view now, not your stance during the negotiations.**

I really don't want to delve into judgments, but it must be noted that, at the time, there was no doubt that the LTTE received substantial support from the Tamil community in Sri Lanka. Sometimes, this support might have been coerced, due to strong-arm tactics and behavior. However, it is also undeniable that the vast majority of Tamils, both in the diaspora and within Sri Lanka, supported the LTTE at that time.

**Do you believe that the LTTE was genuinely committed to peace when they entered into negotiations?**

The LTTE initiated the peace process at the peak of its power, not when they were weak, as some claim. In fact, the LTTE was never as strong as it was in 2001, which is exactly when the peace process began. I see this as a clear signal that, at that time, they were interested in exploring peaceful means to resolve the conflict. Why else would you start a peace process when you are at your strongest?

**You mentioned in an interview that if**



**Prabhakaran had listened to Anton Balasingam, the situation for Sri Lankan Tamils might have been better. Can you elaborate on that?**

Absolutely. Bala, as we all called him, advised against several poor decisions made by the LTTE leadership.

**Did he mention any specific mistakes made by the LTTE leadership to you?**

Absolutely.

## **What mistakes did he mention?**

For instance, he mentioned that the killing of Rajiv Gandhi was a huge mistake. He also pointed out that the LTTE weakened significantly after the split with Karuna and the eastern fighters and was very worried about the effect of the split on the LTTE. Bala resolutely accepted federalism.

## **You are a close friend of President Ranil Wickremesinghe. Do you believe that he will grant some form of power to the Tamils?**

I absolutely believe that Ranil's intention is to find a solution based on the 13th Amendment. This Amendment supports the devolution of power to the Tamils. However, this process is not straightforward. The struggle of the Tamils did not end with the LTTE. It will continue in civilian, non-violent forms and address issues such as land disputes and temple controversies. The Tamil community of course must stand up and speak out. It should unite in support of the 13th Amendment. You don't get anything for free; you must defend your rights.

## **Though the LTTE was militarily defeated, the underlying reasons why the Tamils began their struggle remain unchanged—the same problems still exist. As a friend and advisor to Sri Lanka, what advice would you give to the Sri Lankan government?**

Now, I firmly believe that the 13th Amendment is a crucial step forward for the Tamil quest in Sri Lanka. It is essential for

Tamils to unite and support this Amendment and for the Sri Lankan government to fully implement it. Additionally, all communities should contribute to the country's economic growth. I recall that back in the 1950s, Jaffna was the most developed region in Sri Lanka. However, many Tamils have since left the north and east. The diaspora Tamils, who have achieved immense success abroad, should also support Sri Lanka's economic development. This collective effort will benefit all communities.

## **As you mentioned, the diaspora is a significant force. What advice would you give to them?**

The most important advice for the diaspora is to invest more in Sri Lanka. Many of them are very affluent. I often invite some of my Tamil friends to my tiny apartment in Norway, and they ask me, 'How can you live here? Our houses are much bigger.' They are that affluent. I encourage them to use their expertise to set up companies, invest in business in the homeland, and establish small hotels. This would be a significant help.

The Sri Lankan government should also play a major role in making this process easier. The diaspora Tamils must also understand that the leadership for Sri Lankan Tamils is based here, not abroad. Sometimes, you may hear diaspora people calling for violent attacks or similar actions, but they are not the ones who will suffer. They would sit safely abroad while the suffering remains with the people who live here in Sri Lanka. They must leave the main decisions to the Tamils on the ground.

# Humanitarian Diaries

Part-1

## A UN Worker's Exclusive Testimony to 'Jaffna Monitor' on the 15th Anniversary of Sri Lanka's Brutal War Conclusion

BY:

**Kaniyan Pungundran**

கணியன் பூங்குன்றன்

**N**iththilan (name changed), a courageous United Nations worker, was one of the witnesses to the harrowing scenes of Sri Lanka's final war in 2009. He remains among the few living who can testify to the devastating atrocities committed by both the Sri Lankan government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

In September 2008, following a directive from the Sri Lankan government ordering the immediate evacuation of UN and international humanitarian organizations from LTTE-controlled territories, Niththilan was appointed

as the officer in charge of all UN operations in the LTTE-controlled territory. In this pivotal role, he led the UN mission within the LTTE-controlled region, directing local staff in the absence of his international colleagues.

Currently residing in Europe, Niththilan has decided to break his silence and share his experiences with 'Jaffna Monitor' under the condition of anonymity.

**How were you appointed as the official in charge of the UN following the Sri Lankan government's order for the immediate withdrawal of UN staff from LTTE-controlled areas?**







The order for evacuation was issued on September 2, 2008, during the peak of the war. At that time, it seemed inevitable that Kilinochchi—the de facto capital of the LTTE—would soon fall into military hands.

I believe that the Sri Lankan government did not want any foreign observers present to witness the impending atrocities within the regions controlled by the Tigers. The claimed concern for the safety of United Nations organizations and their international staff was not the government's priority. Instead, their goal was to prevent external witnesses from observing the forthcoming human rights catastrophes—that is the truth. Hence, the government had to expel foreign observers from these areas.



The evacuation order was issued abruptly. Our important meetings typically took place at the UNICEF building, located across the lane from the Kandaswamy Temple in Kilinochchi. During one such meeting, we received a directive from Colombo stating that all United Nations and international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) were ordered to evacuate the areas controlled by the LTTE, except for the ICRC. The ICRC was granted an exception due to its unique contractual obligations with governments and because it does not publicly discuss its observations in war zones.

This notification came as a tremendous shock to us. We had planned to relocate all our operations to nearby Mallavi if Kilinochchi was captured, having already scouted locations for all United Nations organizations and international NGOs to continue their work.

### **How did the people and the local staff of international organizations react when the international workers were ordered to leave?**

The Sri Lankan government's evacuation order extended not only to international staff but also to all aid workers, including locals. All international organizations were instructed to close their offices and withdraw from Tiger-controlled areas. This directive left the entire staff profoundly disheartened. The international workers, who had become deeply attached to the local people, felt particularly distressed.

In my view, the United Nations and other humanitarian organizations should have used their global influence to challenge the government's directive. With over 350,000

people living in these LTTE-controlled areas, these organizations should have taken a stand and declared that they would not abandon them.

Yet, no one—not even the United Nations—made such a declaration. The absence of public advocacy from these organizations was deeply disappointing. If this was a blow to us, imagine the emotional turmoil of the local people.

### **How did the general public react to this...?**

The disappointment among the people was palpable, sparking a spontaneous protest. Normally, in Tiger-controlled areas, the Tigers themselves orchestrated all protests and demonstrations. However, this time, I can confidently say that the protest was genuinely initiated by the people. They desperately pleaded with the international workers, begging them not to leave. The people physically blocked their way, refusing to let them depart.

In this emotionally charged situation, it became necessary to seek assistance from Nadesan, the political head of the LTTE. Following our appeal, the Tigers dispatched their clearance team to ensure the path was safe before any movements could proceed.

### **Was it not a problem for the LTTE that international workers were leaving?**

Internally, the LTTE was not in favor of the departure of international workers. However, they also did not want to be tarnished with the reprehensible label of hindering UN workers. The Tigers have always sought international recognition and were cautious not to antagonize a major organization like the UN.



*A UN Flag Hoisted in Suthanthirapuram, Mullaitivu in 2009*

### **How many local UN workers remained inside the LTTE-held area after the evacuation of international workers?**

More than a hundred local UN staff members and their families, originally from outside the Vanni region but working in LTTE-controlled areas, successfully secured travel passes from the LTTE and departed with the international staff. However, local staff native to the Vanni region were only granted travel passes for themselves, as the LTTE did not issue passes for their families.

Nevertheless, local workers who had close ties with the LTTE managed to secure passes for their families, and they, too, departed. After this, a total of 130 people, including 35 local workers and their family members, remained inside LTTE territory.



I spoke with the UN Resident Coordinator in Sri Lanka and conveyed that I, along with the few UN workers remaining in the LTTE-held area, did not want to abandon the people in distress. We wanted to continue working for them and to act as international witnesses to the atrocities occurring there.

At one point, the UN Resident Coordinator, Neil Buhne, agreed to this arrangement, and I was appointed as the officer in charge of the entire operation. All UN operations in the 'Tigers' area came under my supervision, and I was to report directly to Neil Buhne.

### **Were you provided with any guarantees for your safety by the LTTE or the Sri Lankan government?**

We were given assurances by Nadesan, the political leader of the LTTE. He issued a letter to the local UN workers and their families, guaranteeing them exemption from compulsory conscription, and we encountered no issues in our movements from the 'Tigers' side.

Nadesan assured us that the same respect and honour given to withdrawing international workers would also be extended to the local workers. Furthermore, he guaranteed that the Liberation Tigers would not intrude into any UN premises.

### **Did the LTTE uphold its promise?**

The answer would be both yes and no. As the military was nearing Kilinochchi, our UN storage facilities in the area contained essential supplies such as dry foods and other foodstuffs. Our stores also held thousands of litres of diesel and petrol, which were scarce in the LTTE-held area.

However, one day, an intelligence unit from the LTTE forcefully entered our office at the 55th-mile post in Kilinochchi, intimidated the guards, and loaded all the stored diesel and petrol. Approximately 20-30 barrels were taken. We reported this incident to Nadesan, who acted promptly. He contacted the intelligence unit and demanded the return of the stolen items.

Although we did receive them back, about a third was missing, and the returned diesel and petrol were contaminated with water, rendering them unusable.

### **Did the LTTE confiscate food items and dry rations from the UN stores in the Vanni region during the conflict?**

No, the LTTE did not take food items or dry rations from the UN stores in the Vanni region. Instead, they only requisitioned petrol and diesel, which were scarce resources at the time. During this period, essential food items like rice were abundantly available, with prices as low as 20 rupees. The Vanni region was largely self-sufficient and rich in rice fields, seafood, and vegetables. Although the local population lacked monetary wealth, there was no widespread hunger until the final months of the conflict. As the war intensified, the LTTE leadership relocated to the seashores of Mullaitivu, forcibly taking large numbers of civilians with them. This move dramatically altered the local dynamics, as people lost access to their agricultural lands, leading to increased hardship and poverty.

### **You mentioned that UN personnel and their families were exempted from the forced conscription by the LTTE. Could you elaborate on how the LTTE's forced**



*Aerial View of the Devastated Mullivaikal Region*

**recruitment of children was conducted during that period? Additionally, how did the local population react to these abductions, and what impact did these actions have on the relationship between the LTTE and the community?**

In my opinion, in the eastern provinces under the control of Karuna Amman, then-chief of the Batticaloa and Ampara districts, the LTTE enforced a strict and ruthless conscription policy. This approach was fully endorsed by the LTTE's leadership in the North, who had observed its effectiveness in the East and had long contemplated implementing it in the North.

The LTTE launched an attack on the Muhamalai Forward Defence Line on August 11, 2006, aiming to advance towards Jaffna. Reportedly, the LTTE achieved initial success on the first day. However, from the second day onward, recognizing the strategic importance of Jaffna, the Sri Lankan Army deployed

significant forces in response, and the LTTE lost this offensive.

Following the LTTE's withdrawal from Muhamalai in 2006, the leadership reportedly decided to intensify their recruitment efforts.



*Logo of NESOHR and Its Leader, Father Karunaratnam (Kili Father)*



Initially, the LTTE called for voluntary enlistment from families, requesting that at least one member per non-combatant family join. However, this appeal met with limited response, attracting only 25-30 youths.

Subsequently, the recruitment strategy shifted to compulsory, ruthless enlistment, mandating that one person from each family participate in the movement. This policy shift led to a surge in complaints to both the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the North-East Secretariat on Human Rights (NESOHR), an entity associated with the LTTE.

Despite its ties, NESOHR, under the leadership of Father Karunaratnam (also known as Kili Father), received a vast number of grievances about forced conscriptions and abductions of children.

A close friend of mine who worked at NESOHR conveyed to me that they received around 6,000 complaints by September 2008. Post-September 2008, the situation concerning child abductions reportedly deteriorated, and the LTTE started abducting children and anyone who could bear arms. Before 2008, UNHCR and NESOHR received around 6,000 complaints, but this does not imply that only 6,000 incidents occurred. From what I understand, there were many more incidents that went unreported. However, after 2008, the situation with forced enlistments spiralled out of control. The LTTE's ruthless child abduction units went on a rampage, abducting even small children as young as 14 years old.

**Why did the UN remain a mute spectator to these atrocities? Couldn't the UN take any action?**

We were essentially mute spectators; realistically, we couldn't take any significant actions. We did not have any formal agreements with the LTTE, but they ensured our safety since we were operating within their regions. The UN typically worked with the LTTE, and while we were able to offer advice, we couldn't direct their actions. In this respect, the UN was indeed weak, a fact I must acknowledge.

UN officials discussed the issue of forced enlistments unofficially with LTTE leadership, including figures like Tamilselvan—the then Political leader of the LTTE while he was alive—as well as with Nadesan. Unfortunately, nothing changed. The LTTE claimed to be the de facto government, asserting that mandatory training and enlistment were standard practices in many countries. Our limited influence meant that we could only secure a commitment from them not to forcibly enlist UN workers and their families. I must shamefully admit that was the extent of our capabilities. Frankly, while ensuring our own safety, we could not stop the forced enlistments or abductions.

As the war intensified and LTTE territories diminished, they even abducted a few UN workers and their family members. In my opinion, the primary reason for the LTTE's defeat was their policy of forced enlistment. How can you abduct someone and expect them to fight loyally? This was a thoughtless and cruel decision by the LTTE leadership.

**What are the atrocities committed by the LTTE in forced abductions and enlistments?**

I hesitate to recall these incidents, but there were many heart-wrenching stories that







*Brutal child abductors and war criminals of the LTTE: From left to right: Elilan, former Trincomalee Political Head of the LTTE; C. Ilamparithi, former Jaffna Political Head of the LTTE; and Kannathasan, former Head of the Tamil Eelam Music College*

highlight the LTTE's ruthlessness. Let me share a few. I knew a girl, the top student in the biology stream at A-level in Kilinochi district, who was awaiting admission to Jaffna Medical College. She was the first in her family to potentially become a doctor. Tragically, she was forcibly abducted by the LTTE and died just a few months after the abduction.

The LTTE abducted children from their beds and girls while they were taking baths. They abducted children after mercilessly beating their parents. When parents hid their children, the LTTE abducted the parents and tortured them until the children returned. To escape these ruthless abductions, many people married off their young daughters, some as young as 15 or 16, thinking that if they became pregnant, the LTTE would not abduct them. Hundreds of young girls, only 15,16 years old, got married and became pregnant.

In the Mathalan area, the LTTE even abducted young girls who were two or three months pregnant and sent them to the front lines.

What the LTTE did was a shameful act that every Tamil worldwide should be ashamed of. I do not know who initiated this forced enlistment strategy, but how could the LTTE leadership think that youths, abducted and

sent to the frontline, would fight with ferocity?

**Some suggest that this forceful enlistment may have occurred without the knowledge of the LTTE leader, Prabhakaran..?**

The LTTE often publicly claimed to possess a formidable intelligence wing. It is laughable when people suggest that these atrocities occurred without the knowledge of Prabhakaran, which directly challenges the well-known centralized leadership structure of the LTTE. I am certain that nothing significant could happen in LTTE-controlled territories without Prabhakaran's knowledge. Given that we were operating within the LTTE's clear, single-window system, it is absurd to suggest that these atrocities took place without the awareness of the LTTE leadership.

**Who has been actively involved in carrying out the leadership's orders to forcefully abduct children?**

It was carried out by numerous individuals within the LTTE, with the political wing and the Tamil Eelam police at the forefront. Local area commanders were also deeply



involved. Among those who engaged in these brutal acts, as I witnessed, three figures stood out for their notorious involvement: Ezhilan, who headed the Trincomalee Political Department; Kannathasan, formerly the head of the Tamil Eelam Music College, who later transitioned to an academic role as a lecturer at Jaffna University; and Ilamparithi, former Jaffna political wing head of the LTTE. These individuals orchestrated a chilling campaign of child abduction, and I witnessed all three engaging in these brutal acts. However, it is important to note that these three were not the only ones involved in the child abductions.

### **How was Kannathasan involved in the brutal abductions you witnessed?**

Kannathasan led a brutal abduction squad. I distinctly remember his name and actions from February 4, 2009, the day we, UN workers, were forced to move to the Mathalan area from Puthukkudiyiruppu. Prior to that, we were stationed directly in front of Puthukkudiyiruppu Hospital.

It was Sri Lanka's Independence Day, and the government aimed to bring Puthukkudiyiruppu under control by that date. In their efforts, the government launched intense attacks on the area. On the night of February 3, the Sri Lankan government employed cluster bombs for the first time, with several shells striking Puthukkudiyiruppu Hospital.

That same night, I immediately informed my UN reporting channel about the use of cluster bombs and attached a few photos of the unexploded ordnance. The UN quickly reacted and published a report condemning the use of cluster bombs, which are globally banned. However, the UN shamefully withdrew the

statement on the same day following pressure from the Defense Ministry.

We, United Nations staff members and our families were given just two hours by the government to evacuate on February 4. We relocated to the Mathalan area, and Puthukkudiyiruppu Hospital also moved to an unfinished building in the new Mathalan area.

Dr. Sathiyamoorthy, then the director of Kilinochchi Hospital and now the director of Jaffna Teaching Hospital, is a close friend. He contacted me, suggesting that proximity to the UN staff might shield the hospital from shelling. He requested that we establish our UN hub near the temporary hospital.



*Dr. Sathiyamoorthy*

In front of the temporary hospital was a rice field with a lone poovarassam tree (Indian tulip tree). Under this tree, we raised the UN flag and recorded the GPS coordinates at its four corners, sending them to our office in Vavuniya to officially mark it as a UN hub. Our hub was identified by two trucks and a flag.





*War Criminal Kannathasan*

For many months, terrible abductions occurred around us, but inside our UN hub, none of our staff or their children were abducted. However, Kannathasan led an abduction team that entered our UN hub in the Mathalan area and abducted four people, including two of our staff.

I also witnessed him leading a brutal abduction squad and abducting children. Regrettably, I did not file a criminal case against him, a decision I still regret today.



*M.A.Sumanthiran*

## **Was Kannathasan carrying out the abductions because he was ordered to by the top command, or was he acting willingly?**

Kannathasan conducted these abductions with great enthusiasm. From my observations, he seemed to enjoy directing a large team of child abductors and took pleasure in the act.

A member of the Tamil Eelam police, who was part of the team that came to abduct UN staff members, was a known person to me. He confessed that he was carrying out these terrible acts because he felt there was no other way and he was obeying orders from the top, but Kannathasan was different. He willingly engaged in these actions with evident enjoyment.

He abducted a young girl named Vijayabalan Manjula and sent her to the frontline, where she tragically died. Her mother filed a case against him, and the Vavuniya High Court sentenced him to life imprisonment—a sentence he truly deserved. However, our Tamil National Alliance parliamentarian, Sumanthiran, defended Kannathasan in the court of appeal, and he was later released.

Sumanthiran should be ashamed and deeply regret his actions. He failed to consider the agony of the mother who lost her child.

I'm sure Kannathasan abducted about 500 children, with at least 300 of them killed on the frontline.

**To be continued...**

INTERVIEW

Exclusive  
Interview  
with  
Giovanni  
Porta

# The Foreign Man Who Defied the Sri Lankan Government's Order





By:  
**Our Reporter**

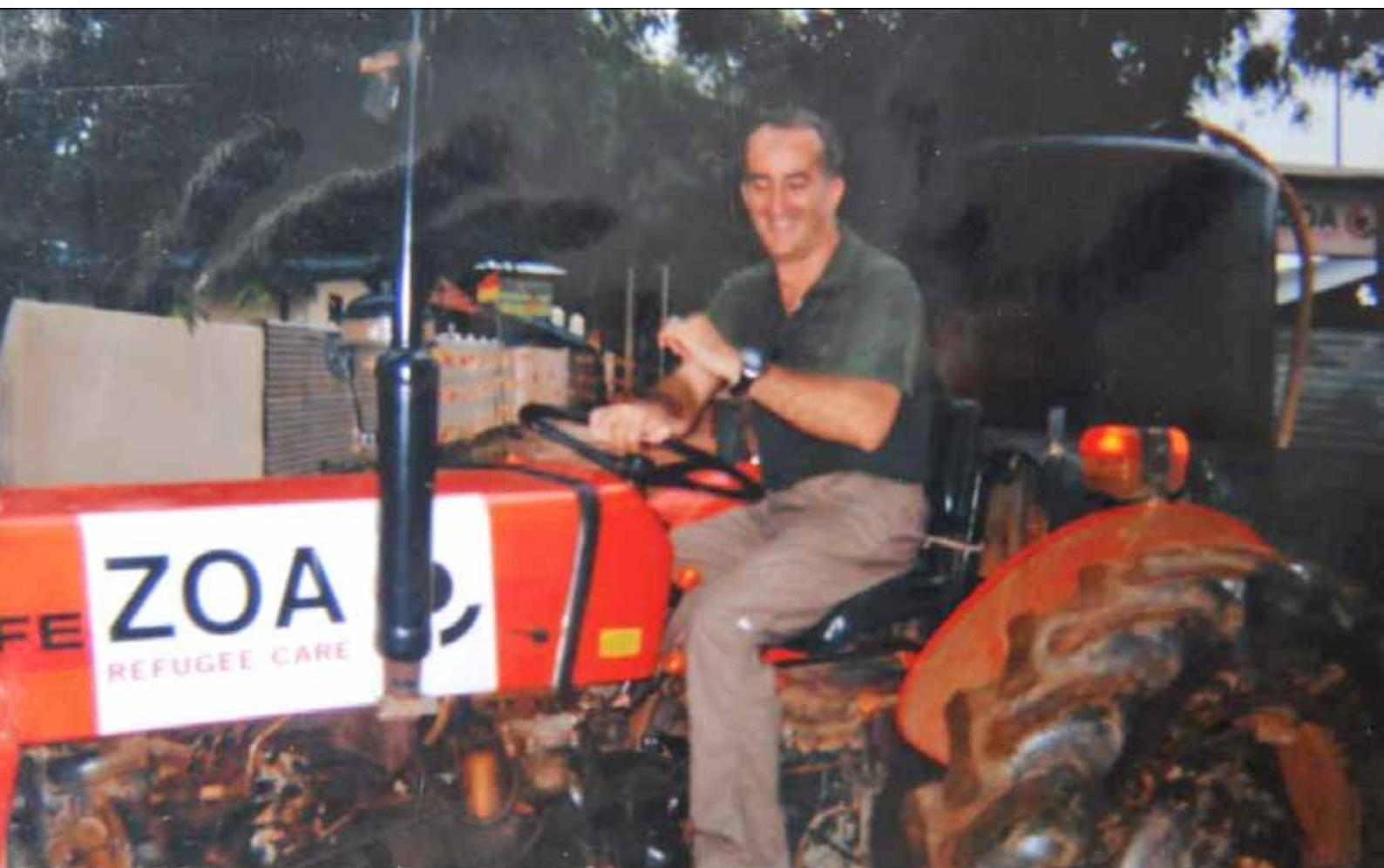
In early September 2008, as the Sri Lankan Civil War neared its harrowing conclusion, the Sri Lankan government issued a critical directive that would significantly alter the course of the conflict. During one of the most intense phases of the nearly three-decade-long war, all foreign NGOs and United Nations agencies were ordered to evacuate from LTTE-controlled areas. The government cited escalating insecurity and rigorous military operations as reasons, asserting the move was necessary to ensure the safety of international staff.

This order drastically changed the humanitarian landscape, creating a significant

void in aid delivery and the monitoring of human rights during a crucial time.

Amid this dramatic backdrop, Giovanni Porta, the Programme Manager for ZOA Refugee Care operating within LTTE-held regions, made a courageous choice. Defying the evacuation order, Porta was the sole foreign aid worker who decided to stay behind for several extra days, placing humanitarian needs above his own safety.

Now residing in a Southeast Asian country and working with another NGO, Porta has granted the Jaffna Monitor an exclusive interview. This conversation comes as we mark the 15th anniversary of the brutal conclusion of the Sri Lankan Civil War on May 18, 2009. Here, we present key insights from our discussion with Porta, reflecting on his experiences and the broader implications of the conflict's end.





## What motivated you to remain in LTTE-controlled areas despite the Sri Lankan government's directives, especially as the conflict escalated and your safety could not be guaranteed?

Like all other international aid organizations and workers, I was instructed to leave the LTTE-controlled region. We were given a mere two weeks, and the directive was abrupt. In a way, that order seemed to demand that I abandon my local colleagues at ZOA and the people I had faithfully served. Leaving felt like an inappropriate response to such a rash order. So, I stayed.

## How would you describe your relationship with the LTTE? Some Sinhala newspapers portrayed you as an LTTE sympathizer.

In fact, working with the LTTE presented significant



challenges. They forcibly abducted my staff for conscription and ransacked my house. My decision to stay was not driven by a good relationship with the LTTE, but by a profound sense of responsibility toward my local staff. I believed that abandoning them would be wrong, as they were caught between the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE. Before leaving, I wanted to ensure that my staff were safely hidden in a jungle area, equipped with all the basic necessities. Additionally, as the security coordinator for all NGOs, I felt an immense responsibility toward the local workers employed by foreign NGOs. I did everything in my power to protect and support them during those critical times.

## Why did the LTTE ransack your house?

The LTTE had suspicions that I might be an agent for the Sri Lankan government or some other foreign entity. I was not willing to make certain compromises with the LTTE, and I refused to provide them with some materials that we had, which infuriated them. Additionally, I travelled to areas within the



LTTE-held territories where others could hardly imagine going. All these factors led them to believe I might be a spy or an agent.

One day, the LTTE ransacked my house while I was not there, but civilians informed me that high-ranking officers from the LTTE's intelligence wing conducted the search. When I found out, my house was completely ransacked. In response, I went to the LTTE office, which was responsible for overseeing NGOs. I took my laptop with me, confronted them, and said, "Here is the laptop; I know you were looking for this. Take it and check." They had no response to my challenge.

### **How many days did you stay in the LTTE-held area after you were ordered to leave?**

I stayed for about 10 days. One day, my office in Colombo called me and relayed a

message from the Defense Ministry, warning that if I did not leave, there could be severe consequences for my organization, possibly leading to the shutdown of all its activities in Sri Lanka. Considering the potential impact on the organization and its mission, I decided to leave the LTTE-held area.

### **How did you leave the LTTE-held area?**

I travelled to Muhamalai, where my mission had arranged for someone to pick me up. Upon arrival, I was informed that the army commander in charge of Muhamalai wanted to meet with me. During our conversation, he asked, both firmly and politely, why I had stayed in the LTTE-held area despite the government's order to evacuate. I explained that I was not willing to abandon my local workers.

Meanwhile, some Sinhala newspapers had





labelled me pro-LTTE and even accused me of training LTTE fighters. Despite my desire to continue working for the people of Sri Lanka, my mission grew concerned that the negative press could lead to attacks against me.

Eventually, I was informed that my visa had been revoked, and I was given only five days to leave the country. I wrote a very polite letter to the then Defense Secretary, Gotabaya Rajapaksa, explaining my reasons for not being able to leave immediately. However, I later learned from my Sri Lankan friends that Gotabaya had ordered my expulsion. There were no interrogations, and I was able to leave the country peacefully.

**You mentioned the forced enlistment by the LTTE. Could you elaborate on that?**

The policy of the LTTE at the time I was in their territory was to require one member from each family to join their forces, regardless of gender. They forcefully enlisted everyone, and the majority of people did not want their daughters and sons to enlist. Some of the youths that the LTTE enlisted were the sole breadwinners of their families.

One day, I received a message that one of my staff, a young girl, had been abducted by the LTTE's abduction team while she was at the market buying groceries for our NGO. I immediately went to the location, where I found a group of LTTE members surrounding her. I approached the chief of the group and asserted that she was under my supervision and they could not take her away. They were surprised by my opposition, as they rarely encountered resistance. They called their superior, and eventually, I was able to take her back with me. She was then forced to stay within our compound for a month. One day, the LTTE tried to enter our compound to take her away. After I left, I learned that the LTTE had abducted her again, but thankfully, she survived the war and is alive today.

**What war crimes did you observe committed by the Sri Lankan Government?**

There were several instances. For example, the army's deep penetration unit, known as the Long Range Reconnaissance Patrol (LRRP), planted a claymore mine that targeted a van full of civilians; many civilians died, and I witnessed their bodies. They also bombed my house. Additionally, I witnessed numerous reckless aerial bombings that contributed to significant civilian casualties. These actions raised serious concerns about violations of international humanitarian law.





# Heartfelt Send-off for Beloved Principal in Vavuniya



The Puthukkulam Junior School community in Vavuniya recently gathered to bid a heartfelt farewell to their beloved principal, Kamalampikai Sockalingam, who retired after years of dedicated service. Known for her maternal approach, Principal Kamalampikai has been a pillar of warmth and guidance, fostering a nurturing environment that significantly improved the school's performance under her leadership.

The farewell ceremony was marked by profound displays of gratitude and reverence. In a striking tribute to her





deep connection with the community, parents and teachers carried the retiring principal on a palanquin, a traditional symbol of honor and respect.

The touching moments from the ceremony have been captured in photographs and videos, now widely shared across social media platforms, showcasing the significant impact Principal Kamalampikai has had on her school and community. As she steps down, her legacy of kindness and educational excellence continues to inspire, leaving a lasting impression on all those she has influenced.

This emotional send-off serves as a powerful testament to the fact that selfless dedication and heartfelt service are always remembered and honored within the community. Principal Kamalampikai's departure underscores the enduring impact of leaders who serve with relentless kindness and a profound commitment to improving the lives of others, creating a legacy that will resonate for generations.







# Sri Lanka's World Cup Dream Team: Young Talents and Trusted Titans Gear Up

By:  
Our Sports  
Correspondent

Sri Lanka has officially announced its 15-man squad for the upcoming 2024 T20 World Cup, blending young prospects with seasoned veterans. The team will be led by Wanidu Hasaranga, who is currently recovering from a heel injury sustained before the IPL season. Despite not bowling yet, Hasaranga has been actively participating in practice matches to regain his form.

Among the newcomers, Dunith Wellalage, a left-arm spinning

all-rounder, has been included despite having no prior experience in T20 internationals. His selection comes on the back of potential impact considerations in the tournament. Other notable inclusions are Kamindu Mendis and Nuwan Thushara, the latter making headlines with a recent performance that included a hat-trick and a total of five wickets for 20 runs.

From Jaffna to the World Stage, Vijayakanth Viyaskanth, a rising



star who recently showcased his talents in the IPL for Sunrisers Hyderabad, will be traveling with the team as part of the reserves.

The batting lineup appears robust, with Pathum Nissanka and Kusal Mendis expected to open, followed by Kamindu Mendis, Sadeera Samarawickrama, Charith Asalanka, and the experienced Angelo Mathews. This lineup is designed to provide stability and explosive power, which is crucial for the fast-paced T20 format.

On the bowling front, the competition remains fierce. Dushmantha Chameera is likely to lead the pace attack, but he will face stiff competition from Thushara, Matheesha Pathirana, and Dilshan Madushanka. In the spin department, captain Hasaranga and Mahesh Theekshana are set to be the go-to options, providing both control and wicket-taking ability.

Veterans like Angelo Mathews, Dhananjaya de Silva, and Dasun Shanaka also return, bringing invaluable experience and depth to the squad. Their presence will be critical in navigating

high-pressure situations throughout the tournament.

Sri Lanka finds itself in Group D alongside Bangladesh, Nepal, the Netherlands, and South Africa. The team will kick off its campaign on June 3 in New York against South Africa, followed by a match against Bangladesh in Dallas on June 8. Their journey will continue with games against Nepal and the Netherlands in Florida and St. Lucia, respectively.

Squad for the T20 World Cup:

**Captain:** Wanidu Hasaranga

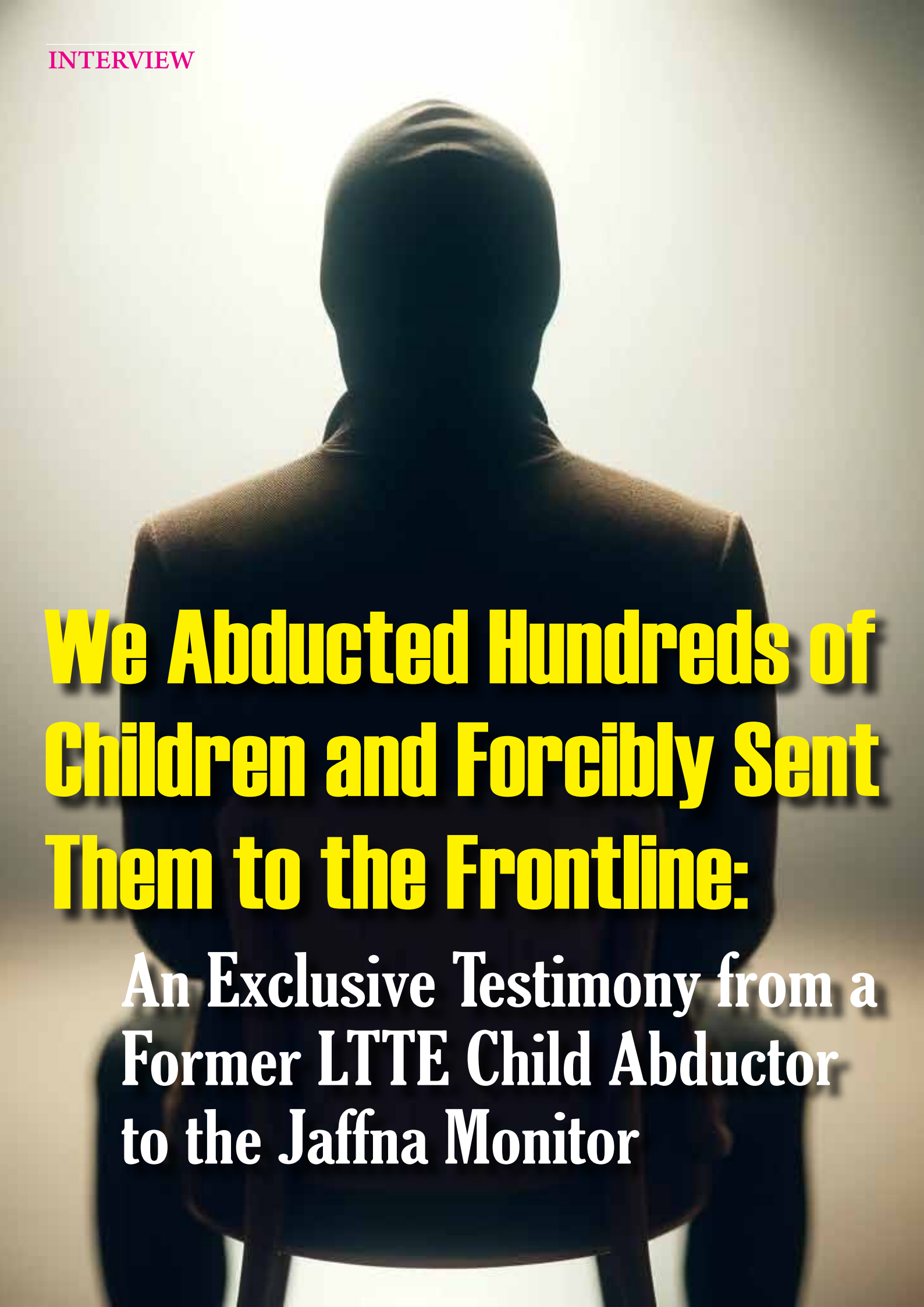
**Vice-Captain:** Charith Asalanka

**Players:** Kusal Mendis, Pathum Nissanka, Kamindu Mendis, Sadeera Samarawickrama, Angelo Mathews, Dasun Shanaka, Dhananjaya de Silva, Maheesh Theekshana, Dunith Wellalage, Dushmantha Chameera, Matheesha Pathirana, Nuwan Thushara, Dilshan Madushanka.

**Traveling Reserves:** Asitha Fernando, Vijayakanth Vijayakanth, Bhanuka Rajapaksa, Janith Liyanage.



INTERVIEW

A silhouette of a person wearing a hooded sweatshirt, seen from behind, against a bright, hazy background. The person is seated, and the image has a somber, mysterious feel.

# **We Abducted Hundreds of Children and Forcibly Sent Them to the Frontline:**

**An Exclusive Testimony from a Former LTTE Child Abductor to the Jaffna Monitor**



By:  
Our Reporter

Pakalavan (name changed), a long-time LTTE member and once a feared child abductor for the LTTE, recounts his harrowing past in an exclusive interview with the Jaffna Monitor. Following the tumultuous conclusion of Sri Lanka's brutal civil war, Pakalavan underwent a rehabilitation process and now resides abroad, wrestling daily with his remorse. He shares his story publicly for the first time, driven by a profound hope: to ensure that the atrocities he once committed are never echoed in Sri Lankan Tamil history. This

interview coincides with the 15th anniversary of May 18, 2009, the day that marked the definitive end of the LTTE and the extinguishing of its leadership.

### Which division were you part of in the LTTE?

I was in the Policy Development Division (கொள்கை முன்னெடுப்பு பிரிவு), which is under the Political wing of the LTTE.

### Who was your boss in this division?

Initially, my boss was Ramesh Anna, also known as Ilanko. He led the Policy Development Division. After S.P. Tamilselvan—the then head of the LTTE's political wing death, Nadesan, the police chief of the LTTE, took over the Political Division, and Ramesh



*From left to right: Prominent LTTE members Arivu, S.P. Tamilselvan (Head of the Political Wing), Senior Commander Balraj, Ilanko (a) Ramesh (Chief of the Policy Development Division), Swarnam (Senior Leader), and Pararajasingam (Head of Justice and Administration Division), 2003-04.*





*Elilan*

Anna became the head of LTTE police. Subsequently, Elilan- then the Trincomalee political head of the LTTE became the chief of the Policy Development Division.

### **What activities was the Policy Development Division involved in?**

Before it became associated with forced conscription and the abduction of children, our division focused on performing street dramas. We operated a bookstore called Arivamuthu BookShop, where we sold books on various topics. We also owned a mini Tata bus that ran between Mallavi and Kilinochchi; the revenue generated was used to fund our activities. Additionally, we had a music troop.

However, in 2006, the LTTE leadership mandated that every family must contribute one child to the struggle. Consequently, our division began visiting households, targeting those without combatant members, to persuade them to provide a child for the cause.

Initially, our unit alone was tasked with enlistment duties, but after a few weeks, all units within the political department were mandated to participate. At that time, our operations were based near the Nanthavanam base, which was under the supervision of the

LTTE's international coordinator, Castro, located near the current Kilinochchi Stadium. Individuals enlisted by our unit were taken to this base for further processing.

Within our main base, a large whiteboard prominently displayed the enlistment performance of each unit within the political department. For example, enlistment numbers such as Nitharsanam (NTT) with 5, the Judiciary Department with 4, the Kilinochchi Political Wing with 3, Voice of Tigers with 4, and Eelanatham with 2 were all noted. At the top of this list, the name of the Policy Development Division was consistently highlighted. This setup fostered a competitive environment among the divisions, each striving to outperform the others in recruitment numbers.

### **How did the listing of enlistment numbers impact enlistment outcome?**

The displaying of enlistment figures was a strategic decision by the LTTE leadership, designed to cultivate a competitive environment among the units within the political department. This approach effectively motivated each unit to strive to surpass the others in terms of enlistment figures. Over time, this competitive dynamic led to a significant shift in tactics. Driven by the desire to increase their figures, all units within the political department eventually engaged in brutal forced enlistment activities.

### **When did the competition among the units in the LTTE's political department start?**

The competition started after August 2006.

## **Were recruitment methods consistent across all LTTE units...?**

There were no standing orders or designated areas for recruitment, which meant that the methods of enlistment could vary widely, influenced by the behaviours of individuals and the practices of each unit.

## **Some LTTE supporters still claim that parents willingly sent their children to war?**

No one can willingly send their child to war—such a notion is typically found only in literature, not in real life. I can confidently say that, to my knowledge, not a single parent voluntarily allowed their children to be enlisted during the last war period. When mandatory enlistment started, parents sought ways to protect their children from conscription. Many families used sea and land routes to reach areas controlled by the army.

## **Which route was considered safe...?**

Sea route.

## **Why was the sea route considered safer than the land route?**

Because, on land, one had to pass through two Forward Defense Lines (FDLs)—those of the LTTE and the army, which involved significant risk. In contrast, the sea route had much fewer restrictions and less likelihood of encountering armed checkpoints, making it a preferable option for escape.

## **What other methods did the general public employ to prevent their**

## **offspring from being enlisted?**

Another strategy used by the general public to avoid enlistment involved marrying their offspring into families with LTTE members. Initially, the LTTE's policy was to recruit only one child from each family. Thus, if one sibling was already enlisted in the LTTE, the others were exempted.

Families whose children were not yet in the LTTE often quickly arranged marriages with LTTE members to secure exemptions. This tactic provided a measure of safety and protection from forced recruitment. I know a landlord who married off his daughter—whom our team was about to enlist—to a famous LTTE leader's brother, providing hundreds of acres of land and a substantial dowry in money. They now live abroad.

There were instances of corruption involving enlistment exemptions among affluent families and individuals. For example, to my knowledge, a prominent businessman in Kilinochchi managed to secure an intelligence wing tag for his son from the intelligence unit. This tag ensured that he could not be recruited by other divisions like ours. However, as far as I know, he was merely sitting in his shop and conducting business. When our team approached him for enlistment, he showed us the tag and claimed that he was working for the intelligence wing.

Another strategy employed by those with connections within the LTTE involved placing their children in units perceived as lower risk, such as the medical, finance, or intelligence units. These roles, typically involving less direct combat compared to frontline units, were considered safer. Families with strong connections within the LTTE leveraged these relationships to place their children in



positions where they would be less exposed to the dangers of active conflict.

## **How did the LTTE enforce enlistment when families began hiding their children?**

Around 2007, as families began hiding their children to avoid enlistment, LTTE units started using name lists to track down potential recruits. Parents often told the enlistment units that their children were not at home. In one instance in Mallavi, after a father claimed his son was absent, our unit monitored the house. It was subsequently discovered that the child was indeed inside. Our unit then entered the house and forcefully abducted him.

## **When did full-scale ruthless forced recruitment start?**

Full-scale forced recruitment began in the middle of 2008. At this time, anyone who appeared capable of bearing arms, including very young children as young as 12 or 13 years old, was forcefully abducted. The recruitment criteria were based less on actual age and more on physical appearance; even our team abducted boys who were 12 or 13 years old but looked older and enlisted them.

## **What was the process for handling recruits once they were enlisted?**

Once individuals were forcibly enlisted, they were initially sent to the Anpu base in Vaddakkachchi. From there, they were transferred to the main training base located in Muthaiyankattu.

During the intense periods of conflict,

especially after the loss of Kilinochchi in December 2008, the atrocities related to forced enlistment escalated. By 2009, the criteria for enlistment focused solely on physical attributes like height rather than age.

At that time, the LTTE's traditional training bases were no longer functional; newly recruited individuals were sent to makeshift training camps in the Mullivaikal Palmyra grove. There, they received only a few days of basic weapons training before being sent to the frontline.

Upon enlistment, children's heads were shaved. I witnessed all the children at the training camp crying, clearly in shock and mentally unprepared for combat. There was also a severe lack of proper food and care, which added to their distress.

In February 2009, as the LTTE's territorial control diminished, LTTE guards without specific assignments were presented with two options: they could either go to the Front Defense Line (FDL) to fight or actively participate in child abduction. Additionally, each unit was restricted to having only a certain number of members. I can assert that all the members who actively engaged in child abduction did so to avoid being sent to the FDL.

## **Who was involved in child abduction because they did not want to go to the FDL?**

Many of us, including myself, were involved in child abduction to avoid being sent to the Front Defense Line (FDL).

## **Who within the LTTE supported the forced enlistment?**



*Jeyam, a senior commander of the LTTE, explaining a strategic map to LTTE soldiers.*

Several key figures within the LTTE supported and actively participated in forced enlistment. Thamilanpan, also known as Jawan, who was the head of the Voice of Tigers, and Thavapalan, the news editor of the Voice of Tigers, both publicly supported and participated in these activities. The police chief of the LTTE, Ramesh, actively took part in the abductions. Additionally, Seralathan of LTTE's National Television of Tamillelam (NTT) and Elilan, the head of the Policy Development Department, were also deeply involved. Many of these individuals within the LTTE contributed to this grievous act.

## **Who opposed the abductions within the LTTE?**

Within the LTTE, there were individuals who vehemently opposed the practice of child abductions. Charles Antony regiment's special commander, Gopith, was one of them. I personally witnessed him arguing with Jawan about this issue. Gopith criticized the



*Gopith*

involvement of some LTTE members in child abduction rather than fighting at the Front Defense Line (FDL). He challenged Jawan to come to the FDL himself, to which Jawan responded dismissively, citing historical examples from Russia. Another leader who opposed these practices was Commander Jayam. I heard him express a wish to die rather than witness the atrocities of child abduction.

## **Did those who forcefully enlisted innocent children also enlist their own**





*Ilango*



*Jawan*



*Seralathan*



*Thavapalan*

### **children in the LTTE and send them to the Front Defense Line (FDL)?**

I knew Jawan well. He involved his elder daughter in the movement but kept her with him instead of sending her to the battlefield. When Jawan surrendered alongside Pulidevan and Natesan, he took his daughter with them, and what followed is well known.

Ilamparathi and Seralathan had underage children; they did not enlist them. Ilango

was not married. Thavapalan had two sons; one was 13 years old, and the other was quite young if I remember correctly. He did not enlist them. Thavapalan's elder son now lives in Germany and is married to the daughter of Kapil Amman, one of the senior leaders of the intelligence wing.

**How are you managing your conscience, given the role you played in the deaths of countless innocent children?**



*From left, front line: Thamilanpan, also known as Jawan, Head of the Voice of Tigers; Pottu Amman, Head of the Tigers' Intelligence Wing; Nadeshan, Head of the LTTE's Political Division. Second line, from left: Papa, Senior Leader and Military Commander; Banu, third from the left.*

It's a struggle. Initially, I didn't realize that forced enlistment was wrong, and I didn't recognize the mistakes in what I was doing. We abducted children from their hiding places; parents went to great lengths to hide their children, even digging holes inside their houses to keep their offspring concealed. We forcefully abducted children from these hideouts as well. However, as the war intensified and the LTTE-controlled area shrank to just a few kilometres, with no semblance of hope that the LTTE would win the war, we were still instructed to forcibly abduct children, regardless of age. At that point, I became aware that what we were doing was wrong. But I couldn't stop; if I had, I would have been sent to the Front Defense Line (FDL), where I likely would have died.

**Is it morally justifiable to make children die just to avoid being sent to the FDL, where you likely would have faced death?**

It was a grave mistake, and I struggle with my conscience every day because of it. However, if I had been sent to the FDL, someone else would have taken my place and continued the brutal enlistments.

**Are you able to sleep peacefully, knowing that you were the reason for the deaths of hundreds of innocent children?**

I am seeking many paths to redemption. I have turned to spirituality, looking for liberation from sin, but deep inside, I know I cannot escape from karma. Agreeing with this interview is also a way of telling the Sri Lankan Tamil population that, as a long-time member of the LTTE, there should never again be an organization or ideology like the LTTE that abducted its own children and made them die en masse.



# Tharshan Selvarajah:

## Baking His Way to the Olympic Torch Relay



*Tharshan Selvarajah*

In an inspiring turn of events, Tharshan Selvarajah, a Tamil baker originally from Sri Lanka who has been calling France his home since 2006, is set to carry the Olympic torch in this year's relay, marking a historic moment as the first Srilankan to participate in such a prestigious role.

Tharshan, whose culinary skills have endeared him to the heart of Paris, came into the limelight last year when he clinched the title for the best baguette in the city. Competing against 176 other entries, his creation not only won him a prize of €4,000 but also the honour of supplying his baguettes to the presidential palace—an accolade that speaks volumes about his mastery.

This year, Tharshan's journey takes an even more illustrious path as he joins the ranks of 10,000 torchbearers in a relay that will weave through over 400 French towns and territories, including picturesque locales like Guadeloupe, Martinique, New Caledonia, and Réunion. The torch's journey will culminate at the grand opening ceremony of the Paris Olympic Games on July 26.

In a conversation with a media outlet, Tharshan Selvarajah shared his excitement and astonishment at being chosen as a torchbearer. "It was a pleasant surprise, and I feel incredibly fortunate," he remarked.

# The legend of Aravinda De Silva;

## A reminiscence



By:

**Dr. Aravinthan  
Arunthavanathan**

On the 17th of March, 1996, a day when Sri Lanka defied all odds to be crowned World Champions, the team's collective effort was undeniable. However, the contribution of one man cannot be overlooked. In fact, a scarcity of superlatives emerges when attempting to describe the impact this one individual had on the cricketing fortunes of a cricket-crazy island.

If the 17th of March, 1996, hadn't unfolded the way it did, the story of Sri Lanka Cricket might have been quite different. Perhaps we would have remained a much-loved minnow forever. You never know. But a man, short in stature yet inexplicably humongous in presence, made all the difference on that beautiful day.

Aravinda De Silva. A genius? No, something far beyond that. If one hasn't watched him play, it might be amusing to hear someone like





Sangakkara, a man literally worshipped by the world, speak of Aravinda as belonging to a different stratosphere. When someone as articulate and astute as Sangakkara makes such statements, they deserve careful analysis.

To decode Aravinda's greatness, I need only point to two days in 1996: the Semi-Final and Final of the World Cup. The final cannot be fully appreciated without acknowledging the impact of the Semi-Final. Aravinda's semi-final performance was a masterful counterattack, a display of skill that would have exhausted the abilities of mere mortals or even geniuses. While cricket superstars like Akram, Ponting, Gilchrist, Stokes, Dhoni, and Gambhir delivered on the big day in the World Cup Finals, Aravinda did it in two knockout games. Silencing 100,000 fans at Kolkata was the stuff of superstardom—a feat so monumental it could have allowed him to rest on his laurels for years. Yet, he outdid even that in the very next game, and not by a small margin. Let that sink in.



In cricket history, no team had successfully chased down the target in a situation like this. Both openers were dismissed early, and Gurusinghe was at the crease, holding on but far from dominating. In this context, Aravinda De Silva's unbeaten 107 spearheaded the Sri Lankan chase—a feat never seen before. While Dhoni had Gambhir and Stokes had Buttler, Aravinda soared above his colleagues. It was a knock many can only dream of, a performance that could alone attest to Aravinda's



greatness. However, that's where we often overlook his equally vital contribution with the ball.

When Taylor and Ponting were batting together, with nearly 140 runs on the board, Sri Lanka's chances seemed all but extinguished before they even started batting. It was a scene reminiscent of the crumbling dream in the Semi-Final. At this critical juncture, Aravinda, picking up Taylor and Ponting in quick succession, delivered the unexpected killer blow that Australia surely hadn't anticipated from him. His spell, yielding three crucial wickets, set the stage for Sri Lanka. That alone was a display of greatness on the most significant day of his nation's cricketing journey, a feat that leaves you in awe.

Now, add that century on top of his show with the ball. Combine both those feats with his Semi-Final knock. Just let that sink in. Close your eyes, envision those achievements, and

ask yourself: Can anyone replicate such a feat? I'm afraid the answer is no.

Aravinda wasn't a commercial icon; he wasn't part of the big three. Romanticizing his feat and adding glamour won't sell. But if it did, it would be the greatest cricketing success story. Regardless, those who witnessed this sequence of events are truly blessed. It was a privilege to watch the great man perform great deeds. Aravinda was a legend. On those two days, he scripted his legacy and signed off in style.

Those who lived it know its true value. And when one wonders why the likes of Sangakkara hold Aravinda in such high esteem, perhaps the answer is simple: just look at those two games, and you'll understand why.

Aravinda De Silva isn't just a name. It's an emotion—a legacy so profound that words scarcely do it justice.





# Anulā

Translated from the original Tamil short story *Anulā* (அனுலா) from the 1964 collection of short stories titled *akkā* (அக்கா) by **A. Muttulingam**

Translated by:  
**Eluttukkiṇiyavan**  
(எழுத்துக்கினியவன்)

She was the reason for my arrogance. It is not that I was chronically arrogant. But a certain cockiness shrouded over my eyes.

Any sign of anger in my face scared her, making her eyes dart hither and thither.

That made me feel smug.

I don't believe in love. There can indeed be sexual attraction between a man and a woman — but I have never believed in the concept of love.

Even when I was caught amid the vortex of love, I

had this nagging doubt “is this love?” right till the end.

But it didn’t appear that Anulā was ever encumbered with any such doubt. She wanted to love me wholeheartedly, and she did. She didn’t seem to care about the potential fallout of being in love.

It was two months until my transfer was due. Thereafter, I will retreat to a post office in some other corner of this island nation. The room that I am living in now will become vacant.

But what about Anulā’s heart?

I played with that tender heart, getting myself ready for a new test.

They say that one can never foretell when love would spring forth. Just as the day is born from the night, love too is born at some instant.

But I think I can put my finger on the exact instant when our love was born.

Lunch was the only meal for which Silva didn’t sit down with me. I was used to eating lunch by myself. I had also gotten accustomed to their food to the extent that I cannot eat without *achchāru* served by Anulā’s own hand.

My plate was on the table. She served standing, ladling out one item after another with a spoon. While I was eating with my head down, something nudged me in my unconscious mind. Startled, I looked up.

She stood there with her eyes fixated on me. There was a certain untypical glamor dominating her eyes.

She smiled gently.

That smile was new to me.

Until then she had been a little girl. Suddenly, it felt like I was allured by her, standing at the threshold of youth.

That smile was pregnant with meaning.

\* \* \*

Day by day, her beauty was on a dangerously upward trajectory. She decked herself up in myriad ways before she appeared in front of me. Sometimes her decorations even seemed a little childish to me.

But I enjoyed admiring her looks. I found my thoughts dwelling on her without conscious effort. My love grew steadily.

That is when she made that mistake. Her love went out of control. She could not bear to be separated from me even for an instant. Neglecting even her filial duties, she became one with me.

It slowly dawned on me that her love is greater than mine. That is when my arrogance was born.

Once I realized that she cannot live without me even for an instant, I started to gradually grow indifferent towards her.

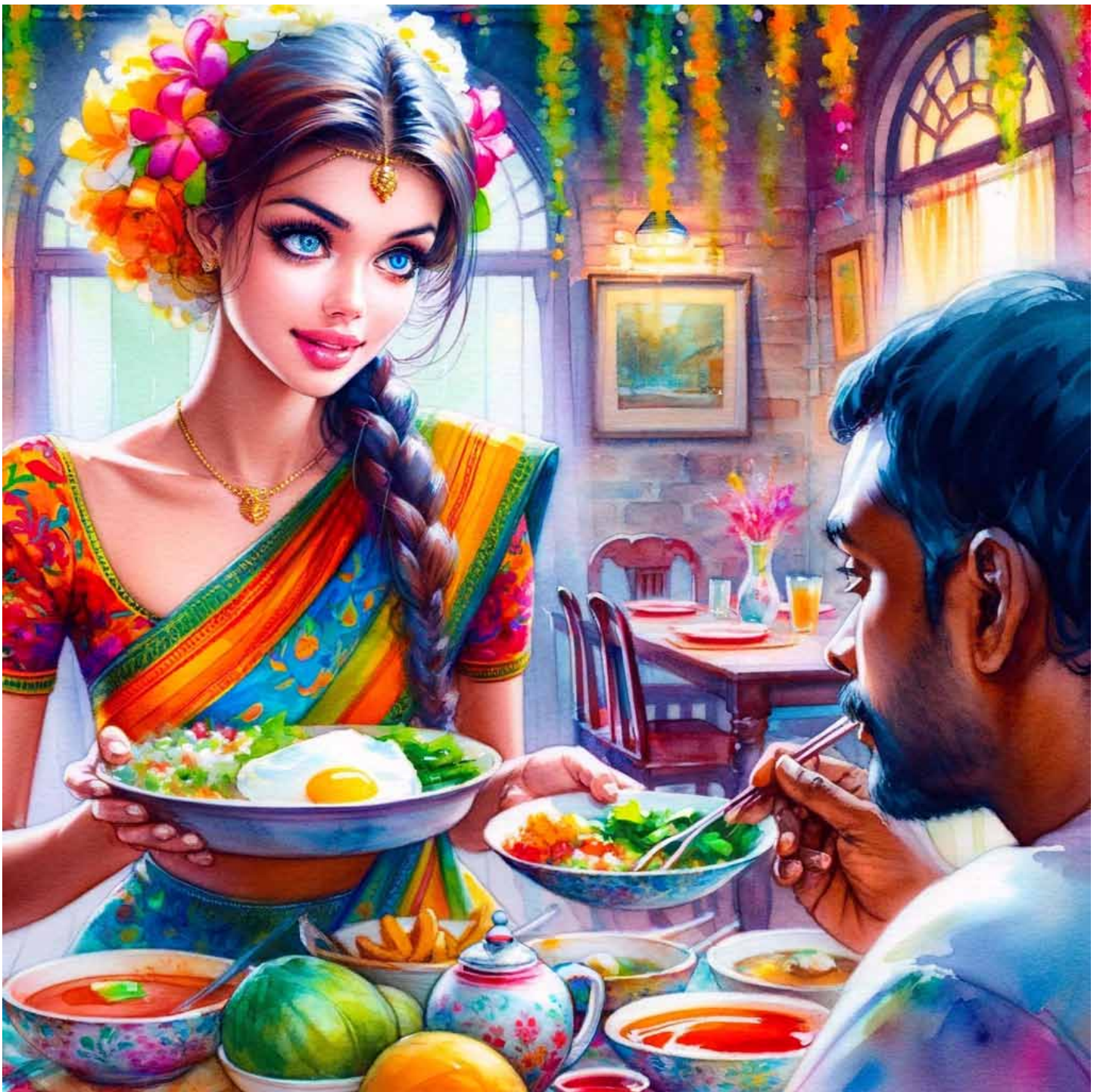
Even her slightest flaws started to magnify in my eyes.

My harsh words wounded her gentle heart. Often, I intentionally spoke harshly just to see the suffering on her face, deriving some perverse pleasure from it.

She didn’t find this behavior strange. Perhaps she thought this was my nature; she didn’t find it a shortcoming. She was content with what she received.

She didn’t think twice about openly demonstrating that she couldn’t live without me.





\* \* \*

Silva's profession was dyeing photos and selling them. Sometimes Anulā helped her father out by doing some dyeing herself. That must have been the case that day. When my usual time for returning home came around, she went inside to wash her hands and waited for me.

No matter how hard she washed her hands, the dye wouldn't disappear so easily.

She ran to the entrance to stand in front of me;

when she saw me, her face lit up in a bright smile, full of joy.

I wore a stern expression and said, "what is this stink — were you dyeing?" with disgust in my voice.

Her face fell. I became inexplicably happy in torturing that tender heart.

But her sadness never persisted for long. Even the hint of a smile from me was enough for her to forsake all her worries and seek refuge in my company.





She, who didn't even know how to be shy. Is it her childlike nature that attracted me to her?

\* \* \*

I was lying on the easy chair reading something. She came by, leaned on the easy chair frame and repeated the one or two Tamil words she knew as if she was reading along with me. It was beautiful to hear her speak Tamil. As she bent down to read, one of her long plaits tickled my chest.

I couldn't bring myself to look at her with anger. I raised my head. Fear appeared in

her eyes. She was beautiful even when she was afraid. Sometimes I wondered if I often became angry at her just to enjoy this beauty.

Her anxious eyes were fixed on me.

"Anu, are you going to leave or not?"

She regarded me wretchedly. Her eyes welled up. My heart relented a little with pity.

I am not sure what made me say it, "Anu, sing me a song", I said.

I don't know why I asked for a song. I



thought the request would drive her into an embarrassed silence.

But no sooner had I finished speaking than she started singing. All those days, I had no idea that she could sing.

Standing straight in front of me, like a well-behaved school kid reciting for a teacher, she was singing.

It was a Sinhala song that started with “I am a king’s daughter”.

“We had a thousand elephants.

A thousand horses.

Ample wealth.

Our fame spread everywhere.

But what did it matter?

Where is all that wealth and fame?” the song continues.

My mind conjured up the image of Anulā as a king’s daughter. I was so immersed in my thoughts that I didn’t even realize that the song had ended.

She took a step forward and regarded me as if she was asking “how was the song?”

I was startled.

I gently tapped her cheeks and said, “your song is just as beautiful as you are”.

That was the only thing I ever did that filled her with so much joy.

The transfer order arrived. Anulā must have overheard when I conveyed the news to Silva.

“Anu”

She was nowhere to be seen. I stepped outside to look for her. As I expected, she was sitting under the longan tree crying. That tree fruits only once every five years. It was due to fruit the following year. She was so looking forward to plucking a longan fruit to give me.

I did not tell her to stop crying. If I had, she would have immediately stopped crying. She was awaiting my command even to cry.

“Anu”

She lightly moved the hands that were covering her face.

“Anu, I do have to leave.”

“Then I will come with you.”

“You?”

“Yes, why can’t I come?”

She wasn’t toying with me; she spoke sincerely. If I had said yes, she would have left with me.

“Anu, are you a baby?”

She then raised her face and looked at me dolefully. Her glance was filled with an uncontrollable sorrow.

“Are you really going to leave me?” she started to weep.

My decision must have taken her by total surprise.

After that she went straight to bed without speaking to me.

The next day, I was packing up. Anulā walked in with her hands behind her back. She dropped something secretly into my bag and looked at me eagerly.

“Anu, what is this?”

It was the little Buddha statue that she had bought during the Kandy *perahera* last year. It was made of ivory. I remembered how excited she was to buy that statue. I almost couldn't bring myself to accept her gift. But with one look at her eyes, I changed my mind.

“Will you never come here again?”

Looking at her face, I was overcome with pity.

“Anu, how can I stay away from you — you will make me *kiribath* won't you?”

When I finally took my leave, she held her face against my ear and asked, “do you really not like me?” amid sobs.

Even then, I couldn't discern the feminine shyness in her face.

Wasn't her love deep? Otherwise, how could she bid me goodbye with a smiling face?

But I had long harbored this deep-seated desire to part from her. I must have had the unquenchable urge to experience the pain of separation.

But I didn't have the endurance to match the urge. Aching thoughts of Anulā filled my heart. I was unable to function. I was about to go crazy.

If my grief was such, Anu, how could her tender heart bear her pain?

I couldn't bear the burden that I had willingly taken on.

She sat by the pillar with her hands around her knees, singing,

“I am a king's daughter.”

In my mind's eye, I saw her trepidatious eyes.

What has she ever received from me except fear?

\*\*\*

I had naively presumed that Anulā was just an unimportant blip in my long life. But the tables turned so quickly that it was as if my life itself was about her. I became keenly aware that every moment without Anulā was one of anguish. My heart yearned for her. Admitting defeat was embarrassing.

Where did all that arrogance go?

\*\*\*

A great weight pressed down on my heart.

My eager eyes spotted Anulā already from far away.

She was sitting with her legs folded. My shadow must have entered her field of vision first. Her startled eyes were momentarily fixated on me. But a nameless sorrow engulfed her face right thereafter.

She ran inside.

Some dyed pictures were drying in the sun. At a distance, the familiar longan tree was shedding a flower or two. Silva's *sarong*, that same old *sarong*, was drying on the clothesline.

Anulā was nowhere to be seen.

“Anu”

Even then it was authority that was dominant in my voice, not love. I went inside. She was rubbing sand onto her hands, trying to wash the dye away.

“Anu”

She didn't even lift her head.





“Anu, are you cross with me?”

She gently lifted her head and shook it. Her characteristic smile did not appear.

“Where is your father?”

“He went to New Town.”

It was just questions and answers. The former fondness has disappeared.

Where is my old Anulā?

The fragrance of kiribath wafted his way. The calendar was four days behind. The place where the Buddha statue stood was stark in its emptiness.

There was an unopened letter on the table, addressed to Silva.

“Anu, aren’t you going to light the lamp?”

She lit a portable oil lamp, placed it on the table, and went away to stand at a distance.

A somewhat dirty blouse, *sāri* tied with the characteristic Sinhala flare at the hip; a face engulfed with sorrow. Even then she reminded me of a Sigiriya fresco.

For the first time, I was floundering in front of her. I was unable to order her around, nor admit defeat.

I regarded her piteously. When I moved the lamp to see her face better, my hand shook.

“Don’t you like that I have come to visit you?”

Her face fell. She bent her head silently.

“Father is discussing my marriage to Piyadāsa....”

An unfamiliar pain stabbed my heart. I couldn’t even imagine the prospect of *Aṇulā* being betrothed to someone else. Nevertheless, I couldn’t help recognizing the faint sense of relief somewhere deep within my heart.

I looked at *Aṇulā*. In the dim light of the lamp, her eyes glistened. I could not ignore it in the same way I used to ignore her tears pouring down. It seemed like that single teardrop would shatter my heart. I did not want her to cry. Had it been the old *Aṇulā*, tears would not have moved me.

But my heart did not have the strength to withstand *Aṇulā*’s tears.

“Anu! Will you sing that song?”

She remained quiet. I could not bear that stubborn silence.

Even though I did not ask her wholeheartedly, I was not prepared to accept the fact that she rejected my request.

“Anu, will you not sing for me ...?”

She wanted to say something. Her lips trembled.

“For how long am I going to beg you?”

The long fingers in her right hand softly shut my mouth.

I could smell the faint odor of dye.

Slowly pulling at the threads on the gunny sack, she began to sing softly.

“I am a king’s daughter.”

As she sang, I kept staring at her eyes lit up by the flickering lamp. When she got to the last words of her song, I felt that all the sad music in this world had blended into her voice.

“All my jewelry is bronze, not gold;

My saree is torn, not silk;

Still,

Don’t laugh at me, passerby!

I am a king’s daughter –

I am... I am ...”

She could not bring herself to sing those last few lines. Instead, she heaved a gentle sigh.

When did the lamp go out?

There wasn’t even the whisper of wind.

\* \* \*



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