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A close-up portrait of a woman with dark, wavy hair, wearing a blue top. She is looking directly at the camera with a slight smile. The background is a soft, out-of-focus green.

**"Literature Cannot
Replace Political Will and
Good Governance"**

**Exclusive Interview with
Writer V.V. Ganeshanathan**

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Celebrating Literary Excellence and Cultural Heritage: A Spotlight on V.V. Ganeshanathan

Dear Readers,

We are exhilarated to unveil the latest edition of the Jaffna Monitor, an eloquent testament to the vivacious voices and multifarious perspectives that sculpt our collective narrative.

This edition distinguishes itself with an exclusive interview featuring the illustrious V.V. "Sugi" Ganeshanathan, an acclaimed American fiction writer, essayist, and journalist of Sri Lankan Tamil lineage. We are euphoric to extol her recent triumph, having secured the prestigious 2024 Carol Shields Prize for Fiction. Notably, she clinched the Women's Prize for Fiction on June 13th—the very day this editorial is penned. Heartfelt felicitations to her!

Ganeshanathan, whose roots trace back to Jaffna, brings a unique blend of cultural richness and literary prowess to the global stage. Her parents moved to the USA, yet she has retained a deep connection to her heritage, which resonates powerfully in her works. It is our great privilege to share her insights, experiences, and the remarkable journey that has led her to such prestigious recognition.

This issue also features an intriguing piece by the renowned Sri Lankan Tamil writer and journalist Saravanan Komathi Nadarasa. His exploration of an under-examined topic promises to captivate and enlighten our readers, offering a fresh, thought-provoking, and engaging perspective.

However, due to unavoidable reasons, we regret to inform you that Part 3 of our exclusive series, "Humanitarian Diaries," will be postponed to our next issue. We understand the anticipation and



appreciate your patience as we strive to bring you this compelling testimony.

Additionally, we are delighted to present a masterful translation of celebrated writer Shobasakthi's short story, மிக உள்ளக விசாரணை (*The Very Internal Investigation*). Skillfully translated by Eluttukkiniyavan, this story delves into the intricacies of human nature and societal dynamics, offering a profound and immersive reading experience.

Thank you for your continued support and engagement with the Jaffna Monitor.

Warm regards,

கணியன் பூங்குன்றன்
Kaniyan Pungundran
Editor- Jaffna Monitor

COVER STORY



"Literature Cannot Replace Political Will and Good Governance"

**Exclusive Interview with
Writer V.V. Ganeshanathan**



By:
Our Special Correspondent

V.V. "Sugi" Ganeshanathan, an American fiction writer, essayist, and journalist of Sri Lankan Tamil descent, is a formidable presence in modern English literature.

Her debut novel, "Love Marriage" (2008), juxtaposes the landscapes of Sri Lanka and North America, intricately weaving the impact of Sri Lankan politics on familial dynamics. This acclaimed work was honored among The Washington Post Book World's Best of 2008 and longlisted for the Orange Prize, establishing her as a literary tour de force.

"Brotherless Night" (2023), her second novel, is set against the tumultuous backdrop of the early Sri Lankan civil war, chronicling the trials of sixteen-year-old Sashikala "Sashi." This poignant and evocative narrative earned the 2024 Carol Shields Prize for Fiction and clinched the prestigious Women's Prize for Fiction on June 13th, just two days before the publication of this fortnightly edition of the Jaffna Monitor.

Her illustrious academic journey includes a degree from Harvard College, an M.F.A. from the University of Iowa, and a master's



V.V. Ganeshanathan (right) accepts the 2024 Carol Shields Prize for Fiction from Kimberley Goode of Bank of Montreal, the presenting sponsor of the award. (Photo by Sam Santos/George Pimentel Photography)

from Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism. As a revered educator, she has imparted wisdom at the University of Michigan and the University of Minnesota.

Her contributions transcend academia; she has served as vice president of the South Asian Journalists Association and holds board positions with the Asian American Writers' Workshop and The Harvard Crimson.

Excerpts from Our Interview with V.V. Ganeshanathan

How do you feel about giving an interview to a magazine based in Jaffna, a place with which you have a hereditary connection?

I'm always thrilled to talk to people in Jaffna

or those who care about Jaffna! Thank you for reaching out to me.

Can you share more about your research process for "Brotherless Night"?

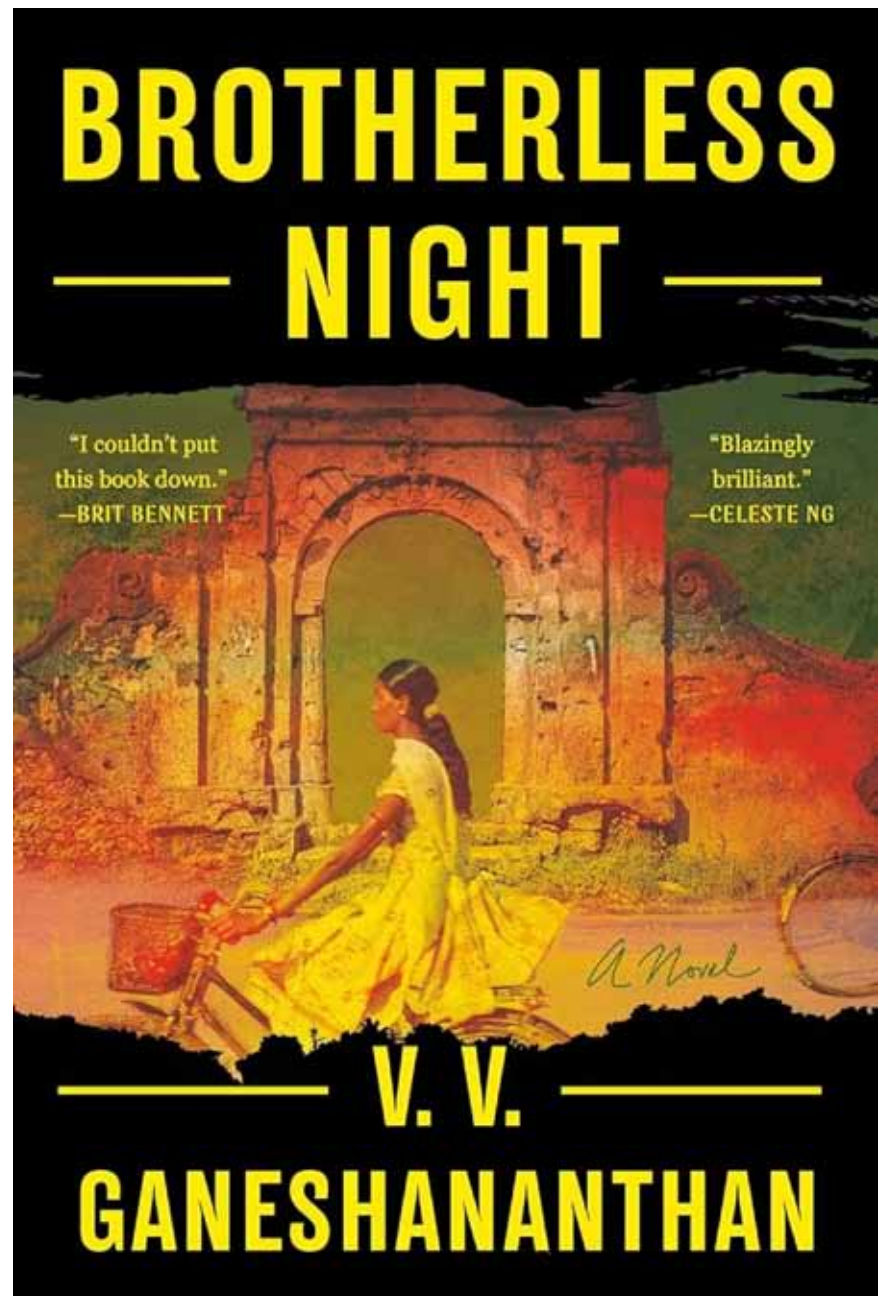
I read extensively—books by authors from many different vantage points and communities. This included scholarly and journalistic accounts, memoirs, and general histories. I also interviewed many people who lived through this period. In this way, I hope to understand both the incompleteness of each story and its specific truth.

How do you approach character development, especially when dealing with historical and political contexts?

The people I read about and spoke to were affected by politics, and so am I. I've been influenced by events like the election of Barack Obama, the election of Donald Trump, 9/11, and the pandemic. By reflecting on how political and historical events in my lifetime have impacted me, I could imagine how political events of the 1980s—such as the burning of the Jaffna Public Library—affected my characters.

The people I interviewed provided specific details about their relationships to events that history books now regard as major occurrences, often described with considerable distance. The library burned, but many people were employed there, studied there, and loved its collections. When my character Dayalan works there, he develops a very distinctive relationship with history, as do his siblings who study at the library.

Your book includes some details that differ from historical or factual accounts, such as the inclusion of practical tests in A/L exams and the idea that it is rare for someone to top the island on their first try. How do you view the role of such creative liberties in your storytelling? How do you balance the need



Cover of "Brotherless Night" – North American Edition, Random House, January 2023

for factual accuracy with the creative freedom of fiction, and what challenges do you face in maintaining this balance?

...I tried to be as factually correct as was interesting." That's from the beginning of Gerontius by James Hamilton-Paterson. A beloved teacher of mine used to quote that to us, and I heard it around the time I started working on this book. The facts as they stand are interesting to me, or I wouldn't have been drawn to this moment in history, but I knew I wasn't going to represent them precisely; that would mean I might as well have written nonfiction. I generally tried to know



when I was sticking to the facts and when I wasn't, but sometimes I thought I had invented something, only to discover that something very close to my creation had occurred. That was always curiously satisfying—a sign that somehow I'd marinated in the research so much that my subconscious knew what had occurred even when my conscious self did not. Of course, the opposite sometimes occurred, too: I would think I had portrayed something accurately, only to have someone tell me I had aimed and missed.

All that said, people's preferences on this point—facts in fiction, historical accuracy in fiction—vary quite a lot and in ways that are difficult to predict. So, in the end, the measure I had to use was my own interest and satisfaction. What facts did I want to include, even on an inarticulable level? How could I know and verify them? Which details were more malleable or represented emotional truths that were valuable to the story? The practical exams are a good example. I personally hate dissection and have also heard

many stories from people who belonged to earlier generations and had to do practical exams. So I had spent a lot of time imagining that and wanted to put it in. That had the added benefit of foreshadowing some choices and challenges Sashi faces later on in the story.

You chose to write about events and experiences that you did not personally live through. What perspectives and insights do you believe you bring to literature by writing from second-hand experiences? Although you did not live through the events described in your book, do you have any personal connections or experiences that influenced your writing?

A good deal of historical fiction is written by people who did not live through the periods they depict and who are working with some amount of distance in terms of time and place,



The 2024 Carol Shields Prize Finalists: From left to right – V.V. Ganeshananthan, Janika Oza, Claudia Dey, Eleanor Catton, and Kim Coleman Foote. V.V. Ganeshananthan emerged as the winner of the 2024 Carol Shields Prize. (Photo by Sam Santos/George Pimentel Photography)

so in that regard, when I began the project, I knew I was not unusual. And I felt that Jaffna in the 1980s was as worthy of that kind of scrutiny as any other period. I did think that my ties to the community—the hereditary connection to which you refer—and my specific training as a journalist and fiction writer might mean that I could aim to create a depiction that offered both broad historical perspective and intensely individualized details. I had grown up with some stories about this time and place and accounts shared by people in my community, and those piqued my interest, so I wanted to learn more.

The book offered an unparalleled opportunity to achieve that. Some measures of distance were useful, and so was collapsing that distance, which I was able to do with the aid of people I already knew and others I met during

the course of studying this period. In other words, I felt that my inherited understanding and connections were enough to push me to begin, but they left me with enough questions that I wanted to write the book. I did not know in advance how it would turn out, and if I had, I wouldn't have needed to write it.

Do you have any plans to write about the second-generation Tamil diaspora, a demographic of growing importance with which you have firsthand experience?

The main character and storyline of my first novel, *Love Marriage*, are diasporic. It's possible I will return to that landscape at some point, but I will probably go on to new terrain first.



What impact do you hope your book will have on readers, both within the Tamil diaspora and beyond? What themes do you want them to take away?

My feelings about the book aren't quite so directed, but on the most basic level, I hope people understand it as an invitation to engage with history and the present. Which version of the story did you know? What other versions might exist? I hope people think about who explains history, who is expected to explain it, which tellers we trust, and why. Who has authority? Who do we think is the audience for a story like this one? What do we expect of them? Why does that include or exclude you, and what kind of power does that give you?

What kind of feedback have you received from the Tamil community

and other readers regarding your portrayal of the civil conflict and its aftermath?

Most strikingly, I've heard from a number of Tamil readers who told me that the book made space for their families to talk about things like Black July or the war when they hadn't previously done so. I didn't expect that, and it really astonished me the first time I had a friend say that my parents and I never talked about this openly until we all read your book, even though my family was affected by what happened. In some cases, I learned that people I had thought comparatively removed from the war had actually had close experiences of violence.

People have also offered surprising and persuasive interpretations that have taught me about my own work. I've been especially happy to hear from Tamil speakers and Tamil heritage speakers who see the influence of

Tamil in my English sentences.

Who or what are your major influences and inspirations in writing, particularly in relation to "Brotherless Night"?

I'm an admirer of A. Sivanandan, Shyam Selvadurai, Romesh Gunsekara, and Shoabsakthi. I also love the work of Jamaica Kincaid and Elizabeth McCracken, as well as writing by Jo Ann Beard, Rohini Mohan, Meera Srinivasan, Namini Wijedasa, Yiyun Li, James Alan McPherson, Colson Whitehead, and Michael Chabon. You can see how I'm mixing nonfiction and fiction writers together here! When I was writing *Brotherless Night*, I repeatedly turned to *The Broken Palmyra* and other works by members of University Teachers for Human Rights (Jaffna). I am particularly grateful for the words of Rajani Thiranaganama and Rajan Hoole, from which I drew the epigraphs of *Brotherless Night*.

You have visited Sri Lanka and Jaffna recently. How do you see the positive and negative aspects of these places and the people?

I love traveling to Sri Lanka and Jaffna, but my recent travels have been somewhat constrained, so I can't generalize too much. I was most recently in Colombo, Kandy, and Jaffna, so I don't know much



about what's going on in the East or South. I saw many ordinary Sri Lankans struggling with the increased costs of living and experiencing the effects of climate change. I also noticed increases in traffic and construction, as well as a sizable military presence that remains a decade and a half after the end of the war. Despite all this, people are doing their best to organize and improve their circumstances. I am heartened to see that some conversations are occurring across the usual divides, though there is still more work to do.

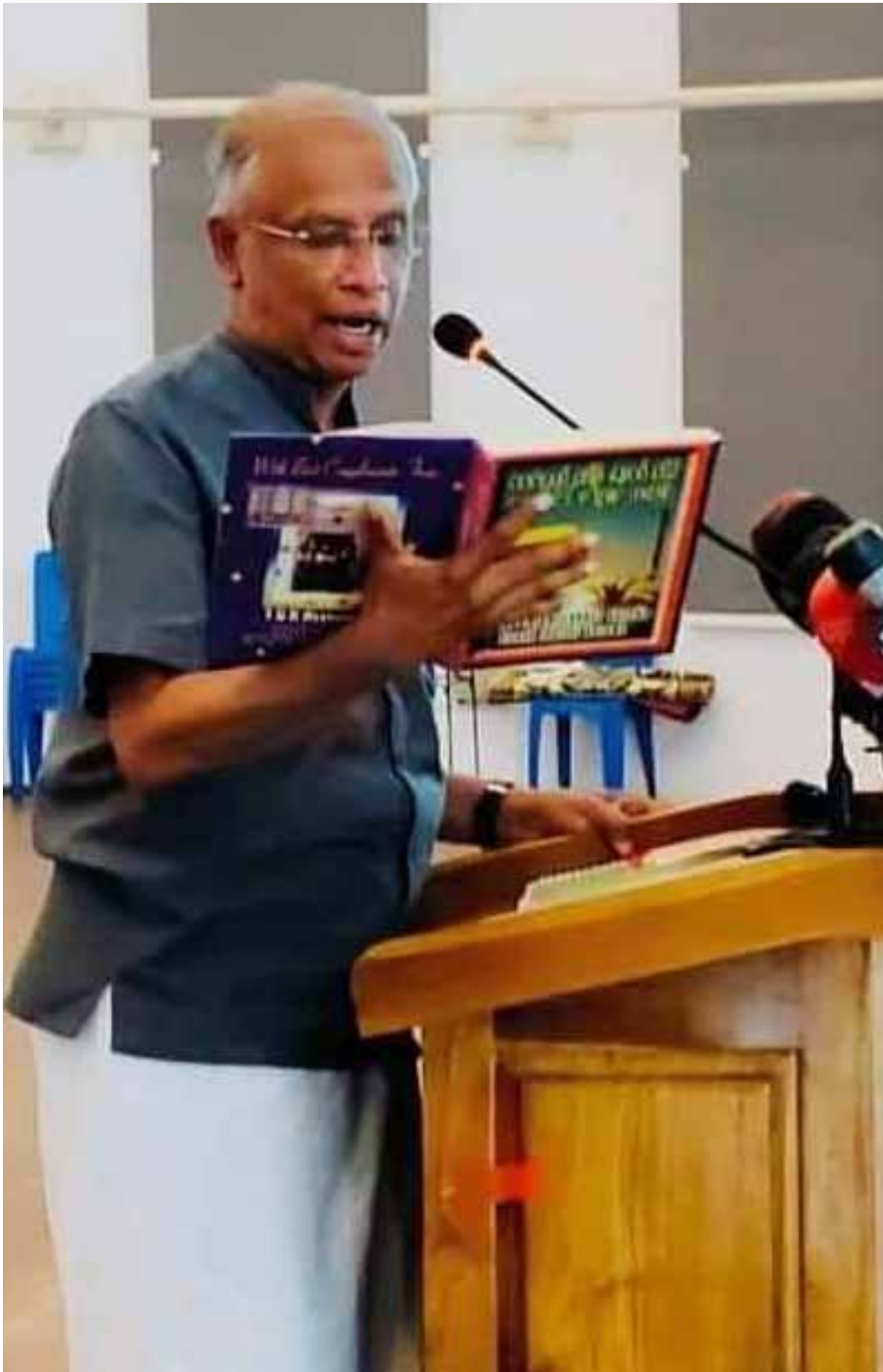
As a writer, can literature build a bridge between the Tamil and Sinhala communities?

I think literature is important, but it is not sufficient on its own. Literature cannot replace political will, good governance, or peace with justice and security for all communities. However, I do hope it helps people to imagine a better society, which is at least a beginning.

**Cover photo by:
Sophia Mayrhofer**

Common Tamil candidate is a useless poisonous experiment:

M.A. Sumanthiran



By:
Our Reporter

"We must campaign among the people against the common Tamil candidate for the presidential election. This matter is a farcical play, a useless poisonous experiment," declared M.A. Sumanthiran, Member of Parliament from the Tamil National Alliance and a leading figure in Ilankai Tamil Arasu Kachchi (ITAK). He made these remarks at a recently held event in Jaffna titled "The Tamil People's Self-Determination Rights and Public Referendum." This political forum, organized by Sumanthiran, aimed to gather various opinions on the Tamil community's stance in the presidential election and, on the sly, to gently nudge aside those advocating for a common Tamil candidate.



I invited those advocating for a common Tamil candidate to a meeting to discuss the prospects of such a candidate for the presidential election," explained M.A. Sumanthiran. "They initially committed to attend. However, when approached later, they informed me that they are a 'group' and their group had collectively decided to abstain from participating, thus withdrawing their earlier commitment. I still have this message saved on my phone," he noted. He also mentioned that the group promoting the common Tamil candidate included a so-called political writer. "When I invited the writer to attend the meeting and share his opinions, he replied that he was part of a group that had decided not to participate, and therefore, he could not attend," Sumanthiran said.

Sumanthiran pondered the reasons behind the refusal of some to attend the meeting, suspecting that their motivations might stem from a reluctance to tolerate differing opinions, which he likened to a form of fascism. He stated, "It is a fundamental democratic

principle to present various opinions to the public. Opinions should engage and challenge each other. To suppress the expression of opinions is tantamount to fascism. When we seek to discuss and share such vital issues with the public, it is perplexing why those who opt out would effectively align themselves with such undemocratic principles." This was his reflection on the matter.

In his address, Sumanthiran articulated a firm and reasoned opposition to the proposal of a common Tamil candidate, characterizing it as detrimental and ill-conceived. He emphasized that the community's united stance should not be interpreted as desperation but as a reaffirmation of their deeply held values.

He highlighted why the proposal for a common Tamil candidate does not align with the principles of a standard referendum or collective electoral decision, as claimed by the so-called supporters of the common Tamil candidate. He noted that a presidential election is fundamentally different. According to

Sumanthiran, in the forthcoming presidential election, voters are expected to support a candidate they genuinely believe is suited to lead the nation rather than backing what he views as an alternative political maneuver.

Therefore, he considers the proposal of a common Tamil candidate not only unnecessary but also counterproductive, risking the integrity and autonomy of the Sri Lankan Tamil community. He argues that endorsing this initiative would renounce their sovereignty and right to self-determination—rights as essential as life itself. Sumanthiran's stance suggests supporting such a candidate would betray the community's fundamental values and principles.

Hitting hard at the so-called civil societies, Sumanthiran stated, "An election is a political activity. Such political activities should be led by political leaders and political parties. Civil society has a role here; they can advise, and their advice is welcome. However, this is a political event. The people did not elect civil

society members for this political event. They elected us. The mandate of the people is with us. The responsibility to make decisions lies in our hands. We cannot relinquish that. If we do, we would be neglecting our responsibilities."

Sumanthiran expressed strong concerns about the prospects for a common Tamil candidate in the forthcoming election, noting that even with full participation, support for such a candidate would likely not surpass 20 percent.

He emphasized that it is inadequate to simply reject this candidate; instead, there is a critical need for active campaigning against him. He explained that this proactive approach is essential to clarify that any defeat of this candidate does not reflect the community's core political beliefs but is instead the result of external manipulations. "As a representative of a major Tamil party, it is our solemn responsibility to oppose this vigorously within our community," he asserted.

Furthermore, Sumanthiran urged his party



members to remain steadfast and resist any fears of being labeled as traitors. "We must stand firm, as our party has always been a staunch advocate for the welfare and survival of our people. Therefore, it is crucial that we strongly confront any actions that threaten our established stance," he stressed.

Sumanthiran highlighted the pivotal role of Tamil votes in shaping the outcomes of Sri Lanka's presidential elections. He noted that in the last three presidential elections, where only two main candidates contended, the Tamil electorate was decisive in the 2015 elections. However, with the upcoming election featuring three prominent candidates—Ranil Wickremesinghe, Sajith Premadasa, and Anura Kumara Dissanayake—Tamil votes are anticipated to exert even more significant influence. He also stressed that if Tamils unite, they can play an important role in electing the Sri Lankan president.

Furthermore, Sumanthiran mentioned that since President Ranil Wickremesinghe has yet to announce his candidacy, formal discussions

with him have not taken place. Dialogue with the other candidates, Sajith Premadasa and Anura Kumara Dissanayake, who have expressed their willingness to talk, is on the agenda. Sumanthiran is pressing President Wickremesinghe to undertake specific pre-election actions that reflect his commitment to addressing the concerns of the Tamil community. These actions, he insists, must be demonstrated before any further engagement.

Sumanthiran levied sharp criticism at the Tamil National People's Front (TNPF) for their stance of boycotting the presidential election. He drew a historical parallel to the 2005 election when LTTE chief Prabhakaran's order to boycott the presidential election directly led to Mahinda Rajapaksa's win—a presidency that saw the ultimate defeat and demise of Prabhakaran himself. Sumanthiran noted that the TNPF is repeating this folly. He subtly hinted that the TNPF should avoid practicing witchcraft at their own expense, much like Prabhakaran did in 2005.



The Passing of Vinayagam, One of the Last Titans of LTTE Intelligence

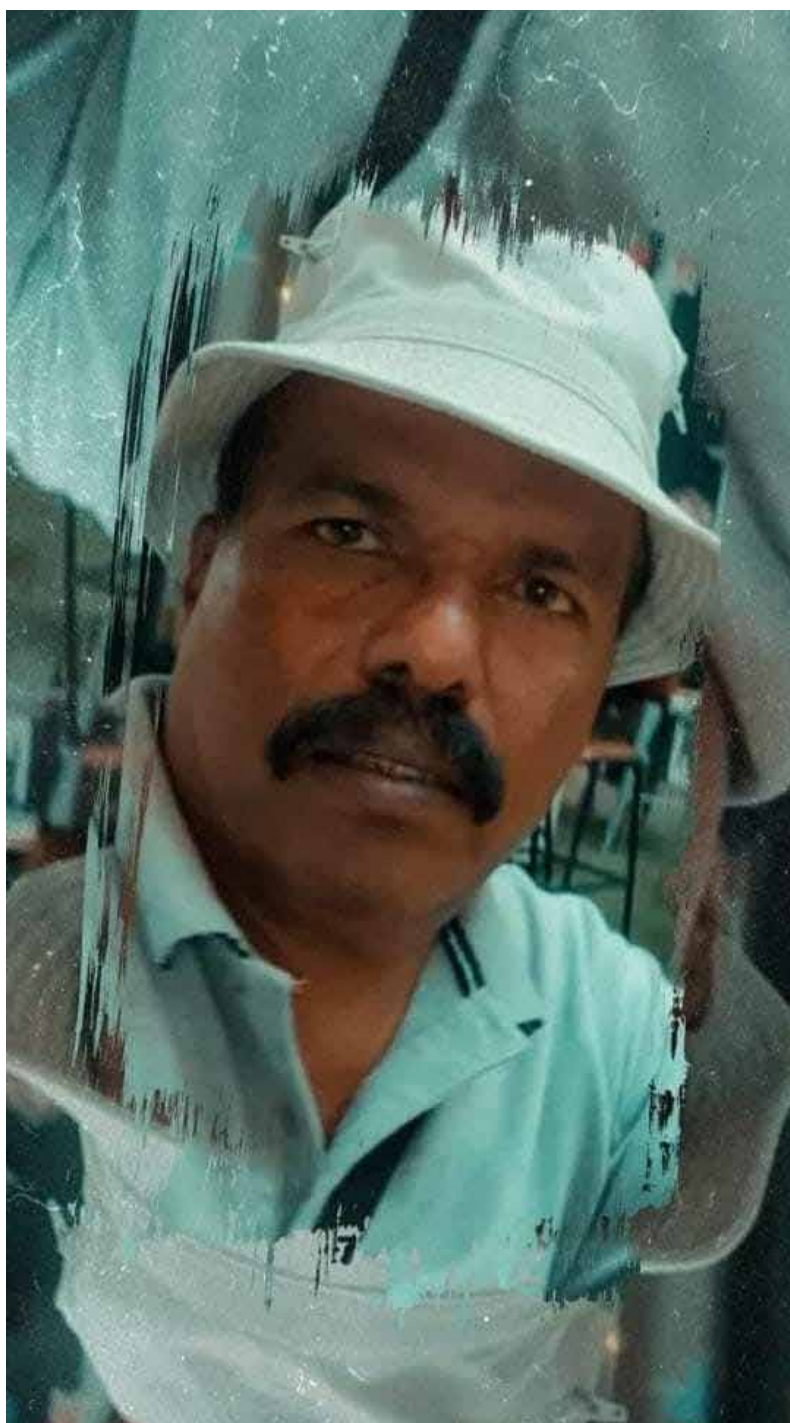


BY:

**Our Special
Correspondent**

Kathirgama Sekarapillai Vinayakamurthy, better known as Vinayagam, a leading figure in the LTTE's intelligence wing, succumbed to cancer on June 4 in France. His passing symbolizes the closure of a significant chapter, as he was among the last of the LTTE's senior intelligence members.

Prominent LTTE intelligence wing leaders who managed to evade the Sri Lankan military include Chiranjeevi Master, Pukalaenthi Master, Paramadeva, Thayaparan, and Vinayagam. Notably, Vinayagam and Chiranjeevi Master each held crucial, yet remarkably similar, ranks within the LTTE's intelligence hierarchy. While Chiranjeevi Master was tasked with overseeing operations in India, Vinayagam led strategic assaults in Sri Lanka's southern region. Both were considered second-tier leaders of the intelligence wing, directly beneath the





Chiranjeevi Master



Pukalaenthi Master



Prabha



Thayaparan, also known as Sangeethan

intelligence chief, Pottu Amman. Thayaparan, who held a key position in the internal intelligence division, currently resides in London under the name Sangeethan.

Still among the living are two other prominent LTTE intelligence operatives: Kalaiyan, the former head of the Trincomalee district intelligence wing, and Prabha, who led the intelligence wing in the Batticaloa district. Both surrendered to the military in the conflict's twilight.

Meanwhile, Vinayagam and Pukalaenthi Master were dispatched from Mullaitivu with a team of Black Tigers to carry out attacks in early 2009. Though their mission was unsuccessful, both managed to escape from Sri Lanka. Vinayagam lived a secret life in France until his death, while Pukalaenthi Master is now believed to be in the UK. Chiranjeevi Master, after purportedly negotiating with India's RAW, now resides in Chennai's Valasaravakkam, running a high-profile supermarket.

According to credible sources within the LTTE, in February 2009, a unit of Black Tigers under Vinayagam's command was transferred from the Mullaitivu-Kepapilavu FDL to the Vavuniya area on the orders of Pottu Amman. The squad infiltrated the Aasikulam forest in Vavuniya. Comprising 10-15 Black Tigers, this elite team was tasked with striking a long-surveilled target in the southern region, personally overseen by Vinayagam. Similarly, Pukalaenthi Master led a smaller contingent of Black Tigers, who were also dispatched to Vavuniya for an attack from Mullaitivu around the same time.



Vinayagam

Former intelligence wing members of the LTTE revealed to the Jaffna Monitor that the team Vinayagam led was a formidable group of elite Black Tigers and seasoned fighters.

Among them was Sempayan, one of the LTTE's sharpest snipers. However, during an engagement with the Sri Lankan Army at the FDL, Sempayan sustained injuries and had to withdraw.

Sempayan is renowned within the LTTE for his sharpshooting skills; he was credited as the assassin in the high-profile killings of Sri Lanka's then Foreign Affairs Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar in Colombo and EPRLF leader Subathiran in Jaffna. The involvement of a sniper of Sempayan's caliber in Vinayagam's team suggests that the planned attack was of significant magnitude, as indicated by our sources.

LTTE intelligence members told the Jaffna Monitor that while Sempayan was involved in high-profile killings like that of Lakshman Kadirgamar, he was well-behaved and often

a soft-spoken, down-to-earth man compared to others of his caliber in the LTTE. They mentioned that Sempayan never showed off or spoke rudely to anyone. The fate of Sempayan is not known to anyone; he is believed to have died in the last battle along with LTTE leader Prabhakaran.

A member of the LTTE's intelligence wing confided to the Jaffna Monitor that there were whispers among the ranks suggesting Vinayagam was plotting a massive attack on Bandaranaike International Airport, which had previously been targeted on July 24, 2001. He and the Black Tigers were allegedly sent to carry out this attack. Although Vinayagam had remained relatively inactive during periods of peace, these rumors strongly indicated that he was orchestrating a significant operation—if not on Bandaranaike International Airport, then somewhere equally important in the south.

The fate of the planned attack by Vinayagam remains in mystery, as it was never executed. Equally enigmatic is Vinayagam's escape, as he managed to flee to France via India. What happened to the Black Tigers dispatched with him to the military-controlled area remains unknown.

In the first week of April 2009, credible sources say that Pottu Amman himself orchestrated the escape of Vinayagam's wife and two children by sending them by boat from the Mathalan coast towards India. However, their escape was thwarted when the Sri Lankan Navy intercepted the boat. All passengers, including Vinayagam's family, were arrested and subsequently detained at the Boosa camp.

It is important to note that while Pottu Amman facilitated the escape of Vinayagam's family, around the same time, civilians attempting to flee the Mullivaikkal and New



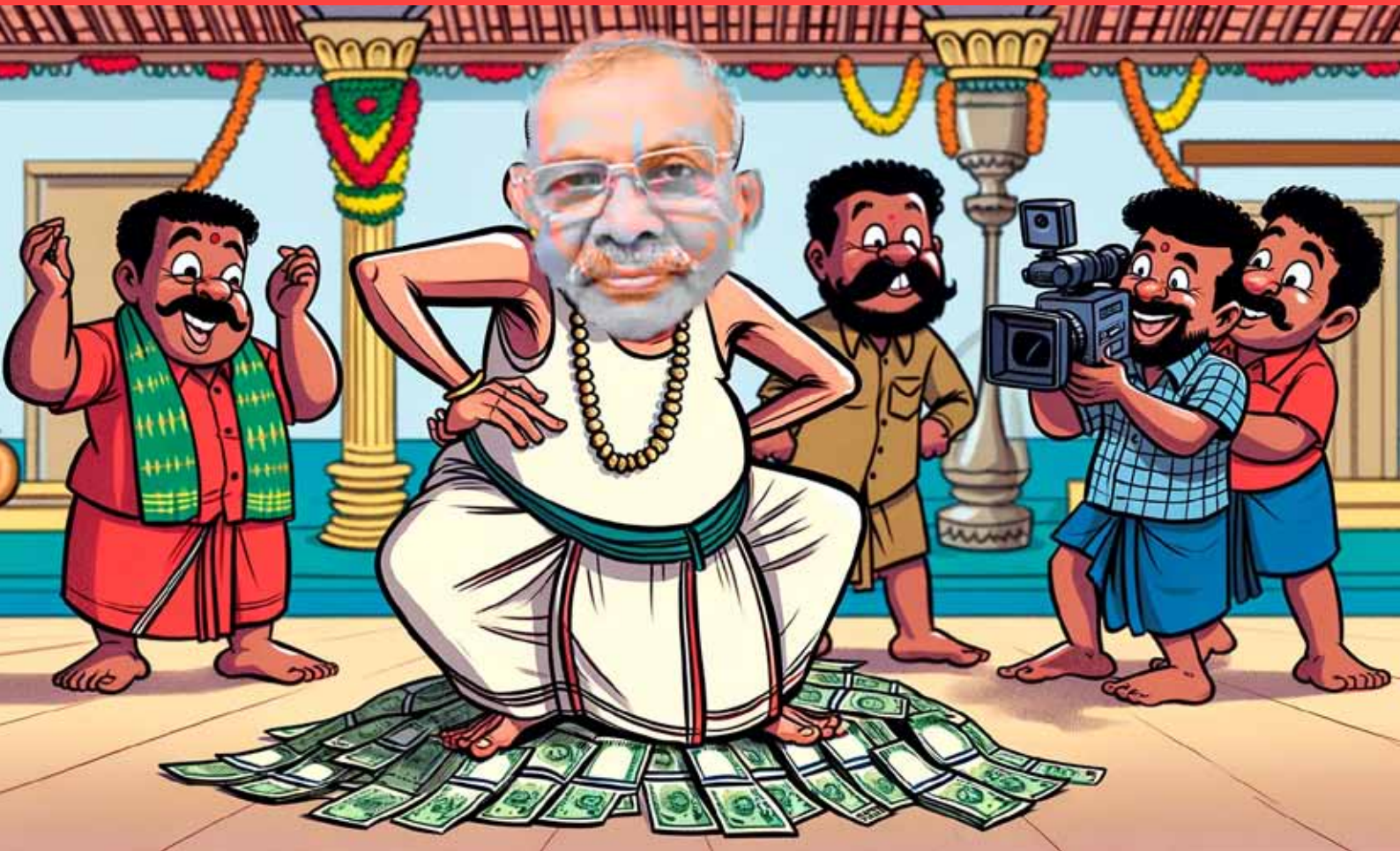
A senior leader of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, Mr. V. Balakumaran, former leader of EROS, with his son in army custody after the brutal end of the Sri Lankan war in May 2009. The wound on Balakumar's hand was caused by Sea Tiger gunfire when he attempted to escape LTTE territory in early 2009. He was caught, shot, and captured by the Sea Tigers, then sent back to shore with his family. On May 18th, 2009, he and his son surrendered to the army and vanished, while his wife and daughter managed to escape.

Mathalan areas by boat were shot dead by the Tigers on orders from the LTTE leadership. During the same period, Balakumar, the former leader of EROS who later became a prominent member of the Tigers, was shot and wounded at sea by the Tigers in his own attempt to escape.

It is reported that following the demise of the LTTE leadership in Mullivaikkal, Vinayagam, and his team concealed themselves within the forest region of Vavuniya. One account suggests that he traveled from Mannar to India by boat and then to France.

Another account from former LTTE members suggests that Vinayagam traveled to Colombo and then flew to France from Katunayake Airport. They claim that after Vinayagam's wife was apprehended and detained by Sri Lankan intelligence services, he had no choice but to collaborate with them, who allegedly facilitated his relocation to France. These sources also argue that Vinayagam, who had over 10-15 Black Tigers under his command, did not initiate any attacks until the very end. The fate of these Black Tigers also remains unknown.

Thiyagi: Dancing on the Money, Literally



Controversy continues to surround Thiyakenthiran Vamadeva, commonly known as "Thiyagi," the owner of TCT Supermarket in Nallur and the chairman of Thiyagi Charitable Trust Jaffna.

Ironically, the name "Thiyagi," meaning sacrificer, was self-bestowed, reflecting his self-aggrandizing character. His recent public aid distribution events, ostensibly aimed at helping the impoverished, have drawn widespread

criticism for their degrading nature. Reports indicate that beneficiaries are often made to wait for extended periods under the scorching sun, subjecting them to unnecessary hardship and indignity.

Adding to the controversy, several videos have surfaced showing Thiyagi dancing to MGR songs. In these videos, he is seen forcefully inviting some of the girls who came to receive aid and dancing with them against their will.

These actions have not only raised concerns about respect for the recipients but have also intensified scrutiny over Vamadeva's sources of wealth, behavior, and mental stability within the local community.

Thiyakenthiran Vamadeva, known as "Thiyagi," announced that he would be distributing donations and aid on June 7th to celebrate his daughter's 40th birthday. This announcement led to thousands of people gathering on Navalar Road, where his supermarket is located, resulting in a massive traffic jam. The police were initially called to regulate traffic and manage the crowd, but their efforts proved insufficient, necessitating the intervention of the army to control the situation. Many waiting in the long queue under the scorching sun for a few thousand rupees of donations were disabled or physically unwell.

In a disturbing incident captured on video, Thiyagi was seen snatching a disabled boy from his mother's arms and holding him while dancing to an old MGR song. The discomfort and physical pain of the child was clearly visible, exacerbating public outrage. This act has been widely condemned as insensitive and exploitative, highlighting



Thiyagi stepping on a bundle of 5000 rupee notes

Thiyagi's blatant disregard for the dignity and well-being of vulnerable individuals.

During his aid distribution event, Thiyakenthiran Vamadeva, known as "Thiyagi," invited numerous YouTubers to give publicity to the ceremony. In an interview with a female YouTuber, Thiyagi claimed he does not respect money. To emphasize his point, he took a bundle of 5000 rupee notes from his shirt pocket, amounting to lakhs of rupees, and threw it on the ground, stepping on it. This act, particularly the disrespect shown towards money—a symbol of prosperity and the goddess Lakshmi in local culture—has infuriated many in Jaffna, who view it as an affront to their values and struggles. Many locals have asked, "Can one do nonsense just because they have money?"

The incident sparked a backlash on social media, with even those who once benefited from his aid questioning the dignity of receiving money in such a degrading manner. Thiyagi further exacerbated the situation by declaring that he fears no one, including the President of Sri Lanka. He stated that if the President wished to meet him, he should come to him. While some locals interpreted this as a symbol of self-respect, Thiyagi's subsequent public request for endorsement of his aspiration to become the Governor of the Northern Province fueled widespread ridicule.

Adding to the controversy are allegations regarding the origins of Thiyagi's wealth. Credible sources claim that the money flaunted by Thiyagi does not originate from his supermarket business, as he claimed, but rather from questionable investments in Europe, including Switzerland. It is alleged that these funds are transferred to Sri Lanka through various channels.

In social media posts, many have started highlighting how Thiyagi seems more focused on self-promotion than on genuinely helping the poor. One user recounted an incident where they approached Thiyagi to help a person needing an immediate kidney transplant. Instead of



providing immediate assistance, Thiyagi told them to bring the patient to his New Year event, where he would distribute money, and asked them to stand in line, even though the patient could barely stand. The Facebook user angrily questioned Thiyagi's motives, suggesting he wanted to use the patient's plight to showcase his generosity to the world rather than offering sincere help.

People have also pointed out that if Thiyagi's intentions are indeed to help others without any expectations, there are many ways to do so without subjecting the poor to indignity. Rather than calling them en masse and throwing money, which they likened to throwing food to stray dogs, they argue that he should adopt a more respectful approach. If Thiyagi genuinely wants to help, he should avoid subjecting the poor to the hardship of standing in line under the scorching sun, particularly those who are differently-abled, visually impaired, and mothers with infants. Instead, he could collaborate with the Grama Niladhari office and Pradesha Saba office to identify those in need and assist them directly.

While it is true that Thiyagi is one of the rare individuals who provide aid to the poor in Jaffna and has donated crores worth of aid, locals pointed out that he seems more interested in showcasing himself as a 'Vallal' (philanthropist) in the style of MGR than in truly helping the poor. They highlighted that this is where the problem lies entirely.



Modi's Third Term: From Solo Act to Needing Backup Singers

By: **Arul**

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has assumed office for a third consecutive term, a rare achievement in independent India, previously accomplished only by the country's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru. However, Modi's political muscles aren't as flexed as they were in 2014 and 2019.

Back in 2014, the BJP secured 282 seats, and the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) coalition, a merry band of center-right and right-wing political parties led by the BJP, won

a total of 336 seats. In 2019, they leveled up, with the BJP winning 303 seats and the NDA securing 353 seats.

This time, though, it's a bit more like a game of political Twister, with fewer solid footings and more balancing acts. In the 2024 elections, the BJP secured only 240 seats, and the NDA coalition achieved a slim majority with 293 seats. Despite this decline, Modi's continuation marks a significant milestone in Indian politics, becoming India's second Prime Minister to serve three consecutive terms.

Modi led a 72-member Union Council of Ministers into office at a grand swearing-in



ceremony at Rashtrapati Bhavan, complete with all the pomp and circumstance. This new cabinet, a lively mix of seasoned veterans and fresh faces, is geared up to tackle the challenges ahead and drive India toward progress.

However, nearly 20 of them hail from political families, proving that dynastic politics is not just a Congress tradition. Congress leader Rahul Gandhi couldn't resist taking a jab at the Modi government, dubbing the NDA ministry a "Parivar Mandal" (family club), adding a splash of humor to the political theater.

PM Modi's cabinet features prominent BJP leaders such as Rajnath Singh, Amit Shah, Nitin Gadkari, and JP Nadda. Notably, with JP Nadda, the current BJP president, returning to the cabinet, it signals that the party might soon appoint a new president, in line with its "one man, one post" policy. The cabinet also includes Nirmala Sitharaman and S. Jaishankar—two Tamils—who continue to handle the crucial ministries of Finance and External Affairs, respectively, just as they did in the previous Modi regime. The irony,

however, is that both rarely identify themselves as Tamils. Tamil Nadu might be scratching its head, wondering, "Are they really one of us?"

Additionally, Tamil Nadu has representation in the form of L. Murugan, the Dalit face of the Tamil Nadu BJP. Despite losing his seat in Nilgiris to DMK heavyweight A. Raja, Murugan was sworn in as Minister of State in the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting of India. He previously served as MOS in the last Modi administration as well.

The Council of Ministers includes 30 Cabinet Ministers, five Ministers of State with Independent Charge, and 36 Ministers of State. Notably, seven former chief ministers have been sworn into the new council, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who previously served as the Chief Minister of Gujarat. The other former C.M.s are Shivraj Singh Chouhan (Madhya Pradesh), Rajnath Singh (Uttar Pradesh), Manohar Lal Khattar (Haryana), Sarbananda Sonowal (Assam), H.D. Kumaraswamy (Karnataka), and Jitan Ram Manjhi (Bihar). Additionally, actor-



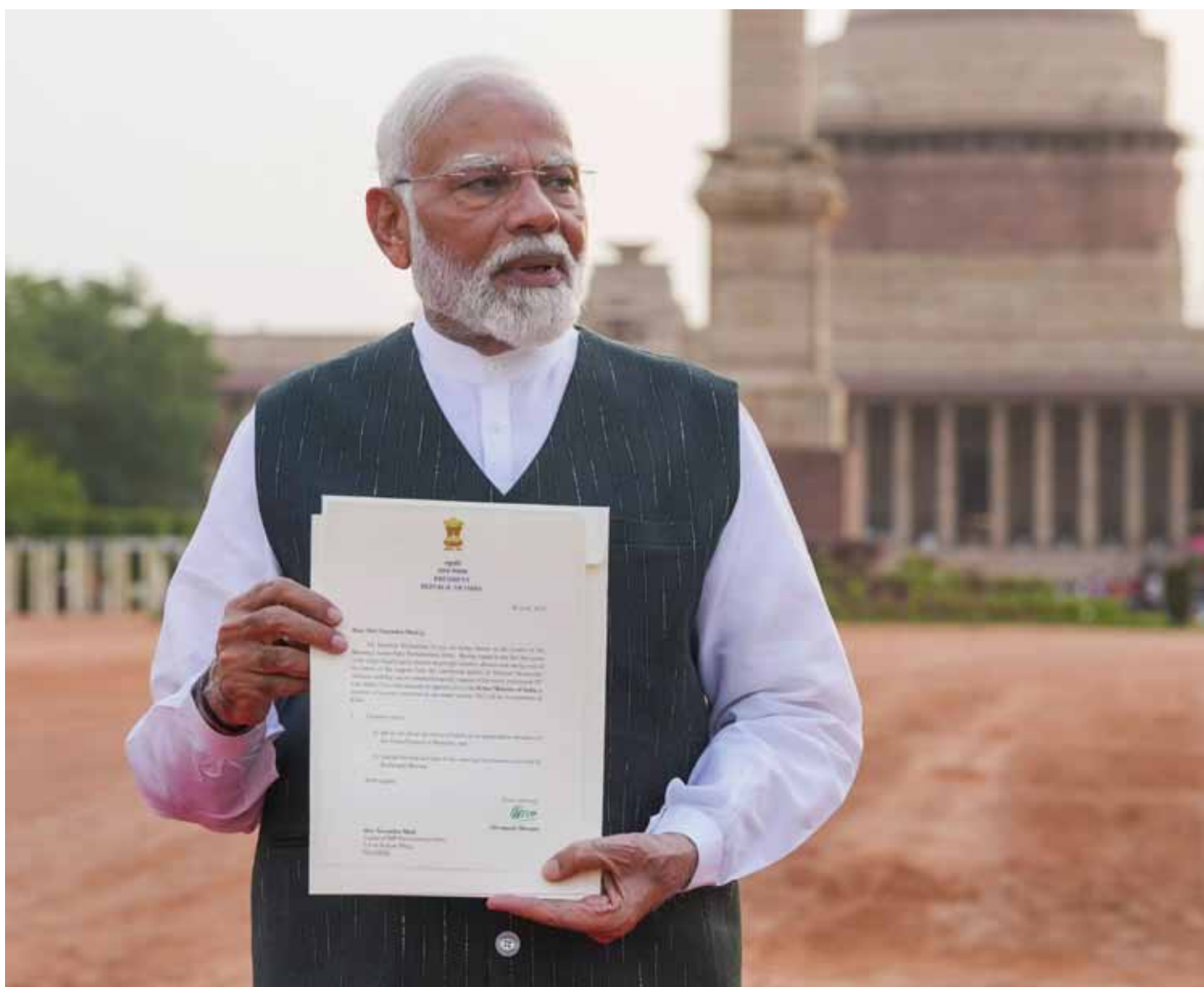
turned-politician Suresh Gopi, the BJP's first Lok Sabha MP from Kerala, has been appointed Minister of State for Tourism.

Significant representation has been given to key states like Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, with Bihar securing four cabinet berths and Uttar Pradesh receiving nine ministerial positions. The cabinet also reflects a diverse composition, with 42 ministers hailing from the Other Backward Class (OBC), Scheduled Caste (S.C.), and Scheduled Tribe (S.T.) communities. However, it is notable that there is no Muslim representation in the new ministry, with not a single Muslim included among the 71 ministers.

"This team of ministers is a great blend of youth and experience; we will leave no stone unturned in improving people's lives. I look forward to serving 140 crore Indians and working with the Council of Ministers to take India to new heights of progress," PM Modi said in a post on X after the ceremony.

Shifting Political Landscape

With all of India's 640 million votes counted after a six-week-long election, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), along with its National Democratic Alliance (NDA), has secured a majority, albeit with a notable reduction in their seat tally compared to the 2019 elections.



In contrast, the opposition INDIA alliance, spearheaded by Rahul Gandhi's Indian National Congress (INC), made remarkable gains, securing 232 seats. The Congress party itself saw a significant increase, winning 99 seats compared to just 52 in 2019.

Key States and Shifting Loyalties

Uttar Pradesh (UP), India's most populous state, has always been a crucial battleground. In 2019, the NDA won 64 of UP's 80 seats, with the BJP taking 62. However, in 2024, the INDIA alliance made significant inroads. The Samajwadi Party (S.P.) won 37 seats, and the Congress took six, totaling 43 seats for the opposition. The BJP managed to win only 33 seats, with its allies securing three more.

A stunning loss for the BJP occurred in the Faizabad constituency, home to the Ram temple in Ayodhya, a cornerstone of the BJP's Hindutva campaign. Despite Modi consecrating the temple in January, the BJP lost this symbolic seat. Post-election videos reveal widespread public resentment as the BJP-ruled state government in Uttar Pradesh demolished hundreds of houses and shops to create a grand pathway to the temple. This heavy-handed approach sparked a significant backlash against the ruling government at both the state and central levels. When we contacted a few Delhi BJP leaders, they candidly admitted that, with the consecration of the Ram temple, every BJP leader in UP thought they were going to have a cakewalk in the election. However, the shrewd Samajwadi Party leader Akhilesh Yadav had other plans.

While Ayodhya voters support the Ram temple, they prioritized their basic needs when faced with the choice between Ram,

Food, and shelter. As a saying in the Hindi heartlands goes: "Pehle bhojan, phir aashray, aur phir mandir." ("Food first, shelter second, and temple third.") Clearly, the voters took this seriously.

In Maharashtra, another key state, the BJP and its allies suffered significant losses. The INDIA alliance, which includes the Congress and splinter groups of Shiv Sena and the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP), won 30 of the state's 48 seats, with the Congress alone winning 13. The BJP secured only nine seats.

Historical Context and Political Evolution

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's BJP and its right-wing predecessors have risen from political obscurity to dominate India's parliament. The BJP first came to power with a coalition government for just 13 days in 1996, subsequently ruling from 1998 to 2004. After a surprise loss to a Congress-led coalition in 2004, the Congress governed until 2014 under Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. However, from 2014 onward, it has been Modi's era, with him enjoying immense public trust and being seen as an unbeatable leader.

However, this election has shown a shift, as the BJP did not secure a single-party majority and now relies heavily on its allies. Despite this, in Indian politics, anything can happen. The BJP could still emerge as the single largest party by... let's just say, "convincing" a few M.P.s from other parties to switch sides or by sending a few friendly visits from the CBI and other investigating agencies to targeted M.P.s—a tactic they seem to have perfected with a wink and a nudge.

"Check" This Out: When 1,000 Rupees Sparked a Smile



The semifinal match of the grand soft tennis cricket competition hosted by the Ariyalai Killadies recently took place at the Ariyalai Saraswathi Sports Ground.

The match was kicked off by Sajith Premadasa, the leader of the opposition and the United People's Power, along with Umasanthira Prakash, the Deputy Secretary of the United People's Power, who graced the event as honored guests.

But here's the kicker—literally! What stole the show was this snapshot: the "Man of the Match" proudly receiving a cash prize of 1,000 rupees from Sajith. Now, here's the funny part—the grand, elaborately decorated check they handed over must have cost more to make than the actual prize money! It had everyone chuckling and wondering if they should frame the check as a work of art.



Election Circus: **LTTE Loyalists Caught in a Ranil Riddle!**

In the famous Tamil movie Vada Chennai, there's a memorable line where Kishore's character says, "அவன் பொருளை எடுத்து அவனையே போடணும்," loosely translating to "Take his weapon and kill him." The North-East Intellectuals Organization almost did the same to the proponents of the so-called common Tamil candidate.

This North-East Intellectuals Organization has thrown its support behind Ranil Wickremesinghe, directly opposing the Tamil common candidate for the upcoming elections. They reasoned that even LTTE leader Prabhakaran recognized Wickremesinghe's knack for bold and

decisive actions and stated that Ranil's leadership was crucial for the Tamil community. The organization indirectly said they support Ranil by following their dear leader, Prabhakaran.

What's amusing is that the people working against Ranil's prospects by proposing the common Tamil candidate are die-hard LTTE and Prabhakaran fans. These LTTE enthusiasts are now left in a state of confusion, unsure whether to support this statement or not.

They've been handed a plot twist straight out of a political thriller!

Gurunagar Commemorates Victims of the Mandaitivu Sea Massacre on 38th Anniversary



By:
Our Reporter

The community of Gurunagar came together to solemnly commemorate the 38th Anniversary of the Mandaitivu Sea Massacre, a dark chapter etched deeply into the collective memory of Gurunagar's fishing community on June 10.

On this day, villagers, along with the children and relatives of the victims, gathered to honor the 31 Tamil fishermen, aged between 13 and 62, who were brutally murdered by Sri Lankan Navy personnel on June 10, 1986. The massacre remains a poignant reminder of the atrocities endured during the conflict, with the innocent souls lost that day continuing to be mourned by their loved ones and the wider community.



The ceremony was marked by a heartfelt tribute to those who perished, emphasizing the enduring impact of their loss on the community and the persistent brutality of the war. As the names of the victims were read aloud, the gathering stood in silent remembrance, reaffirming their commitment to honoring the memory of the fishermen and calling for justice and reconciliation.

On the early morning of June 10, 1986, the fishermen of Gurunagar set out aboard the boat "Thuya Oli" (Holy Light) toward Mandaitivu island, unaware of the horror awaited them. As they neared the islet, Sri Lankan Navy personnel, clad in ominous black uniforms, launched a ruthless ambush. Despite the fishermen's frantic attempts to signal their civilian status, the navy mercilessly destroyed their boats and nets before inflicting unimaginable torture and ultimately massacring them. Mr. Semon Mariyathas, then 41, was the sole miraculous survivor of

that fateful day, yet he continues to bear deep physical and emotional scars.

The inquest held on June 26, 1986, led by the Magistrate under Inquest No. 9388, returned a verdict of homicide, unequivocally identifying the attackers as navy personnel. Medical evidence revealed the brutal nature of the attack, with all victims suffering multiple injuries from machine gunfire. The bodies of the fishermen bore signs of torture, with some having their eyes gouged out and stomachs slashed open, highlighting the sheer brutality inflicted upon them.

This year, a poignant ceremony was held at the monument commemorating the Mandaitivu Sea Massacre. The current memorial unveiled in 2004 on the massacre's 18th Anniversary, replaced an earlier memorial that was destroyed by the Sri Lankan Army during a military operation in 1996.

Tearful families and surviving relatives gathered to share stories of their lost loved ones. "The scars of that day remain fresh in our hearts," said one of the organizers. "We will never forget the brutality inflicted upon our people, nor will we cease our calls for justice. The Mandaitivu Sea Massacre symbolizes our enduring struggle."

The ceremony concluded with a candlelight vigil, each flame a tribute to the 31 martyrs, their names resonating through the air in a somber roll call of lost lives. The community's resolve to honor their memory remains unbroken, a beacon of hope amid enduring sorrow.

This annual remembrance is a reminder of the urgent need for justice and reconciliation in Sri Lanka. It calls upon all to acknowledge the past and strive for a future unmarred by such atrocities.





International Participation at Punnaicholai's Fire-Walking Festival



By:
Our Batticalo Reporter

The annual fire-walking festival at Punnaicholai Pathirakaliamman Temple in Batticaloa, Sri Lanka, saw a remarkable turnout this year with significant participation from foreign devotees, including children. This event, recognized as one of the largest fire-walking ceremonies in Sri Lanka, attracted visitors from various parts of the world.

The festival, known for its deep religious significance, commenced with the traditional opening of the



temple's sacred doors last Sunday. Throughout the day, the temple grounds were filled with special prayers and the goddess's sea bathing ritual, highlighting the rich ceremonial heritage of the region.

The fire-walking ceremony was the focal point of the day. Foreign participants, alongside local devotees, walked across the bed of hot coals, fulfilling their vows in a profound display of faith and devotion.

The presence of foreign children, accompanied by their parents and supported by local community members, added a touching and heartwarming aspect to the ritual. These young participants, some experiencing Sri Lankan culture for the first time, exhibited remarkable courage and were met with cheers of encouragement from the crowd.



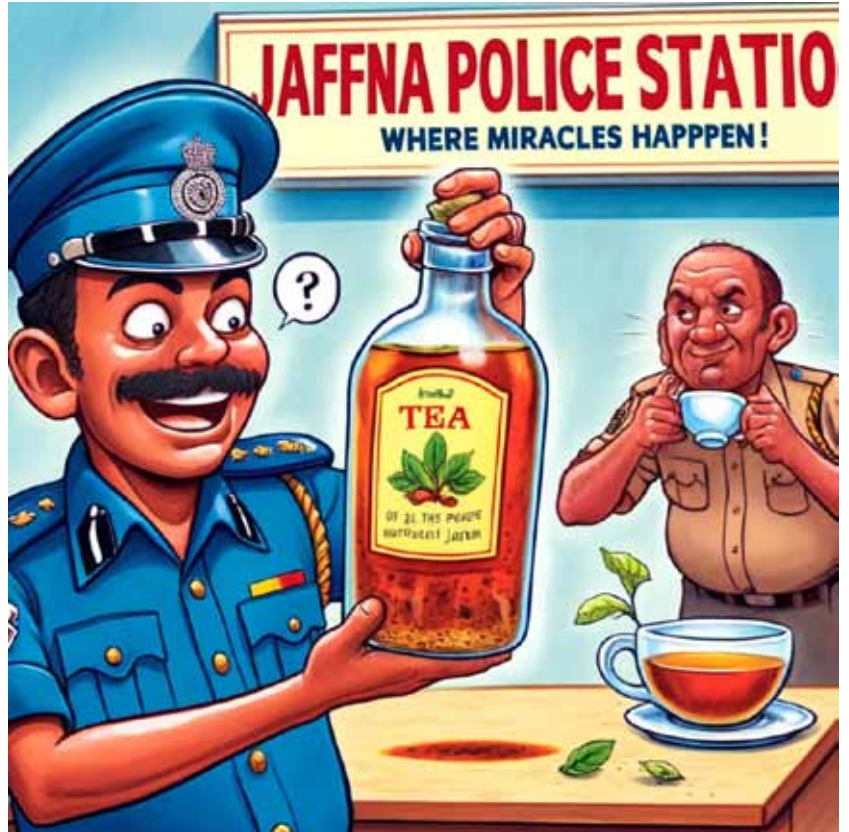
Jaffna's Reverse Jesus Moment: Alcohol Transformed into Tea

Jaffna – In a twist that seems straight out of a comedy, the Kayts Magistrate's Court has ordered an investigation into a curious case where confiscated alcohol turned into a tea-like substance while under police custody in Neduntheevu.

It all started when a local man was arrested by the Neduntheevu police for possessing an excessive number of alcohol bottles. He was promptly brought to court, where the evidence—carefully sealed alcohol bottles—was presented.

During the trial, the suspect admitted to his boozy stash, leading the court to fine him and allow him to keep up to 10 bottles, while the rest were to be destroyed. However, when the police returned the permitted 10 bottles, the suspect noticed something strange. Instead of the familiar sight of his cherished spirits, he found bottles containing a suspiciously tea-like liquid with sediment settled at the bottom.

Raising eyebrows and perhaps a chuckle, the suspect lodged a complaint with the court registrar, subtly suggesting that the police might have enjoyed his alcohol and replaced it with tea. After all,



what better way to beat the summer heat than with a refreshing cup of... confiscated evidence?

After receiving the written complaint, the registrar brought this amusingly odd situation to the attention of the magistrate, who has now ordered a full investigation into this peculiar transformation. Was it a case of misplaced priorities or just an honest mistake by officers with a penchant for tea? The people of Jaffna wait eagerly for the answers.

As the investigation unfolds, some in Jaffna are comparing this mysterious transformation to a well-known biblical miracle. "If Jesus turned water into wine, it seems our local police have performed the reverse miracle—turning wine into tea!" joked one amused local.



Former Minister Draws Unusual Comparison Between Wild Elephants and LTTE in Wildlife Debate

In an unexpectedly colorful turn during a recent parliamentary debate, former Minister of Wildlife Protection, Wimalaweera Dissanayake, dropped a bombshell comparison that left attendees both bemused and concerned. He likened the disruptive antics of wild elephants in Sri Lanka to the infamous guerrilla tactics of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). "Just like the LTTE, these elephants are making it impossible for us to get a good night's sleep!" he exclaimed, highlighting the sleepless nights suffered by residents in elephant-frequented areas.

Dissanayake elaborated on the elephantine problem, saying, "You can't even step outside for a midnight snack without wondering if an elephant is lurking in the bushes!" This comparison, while stark, humorously underscored the constant vigilance required by villagers living in these conflict zones.

Selective Pachyderm Pardons?

He further revealed a curious anomaly in elephant behavior—apparently, homes of individuals who have secured court





injunctions seem to be mysteriously spared by the elephants, almost as if the animals had a legal understanding themselves. "Maybe these elephants are more law-abiding than we thought!" Dissanayake quipped, suggesting a need for a revision of current wildlife management strategies.

Urgent Calls Amidst Light-Hearted Analogies

Despite the light-hearted analogy, Dissanayake's message carried a serious undertone about the need for effective and fair solutions to mitigate human-elephant conflicts. "We need action that's as swift as an elephant charge but as wise as an elephant's memory," he stated, emphasizing the urgency of finding a balance that protects both the rural communities and the majestic wildlife that strays too close.

Humanitarian *Diaries*

Owing to unforeseen circumstances, Part 3 of this riveting testimony, marking the 15th anniversary of Sri Lanka's brutal war conclusion, will be featured in our subsequent issue. Stay tuned for this enthralling continuation.



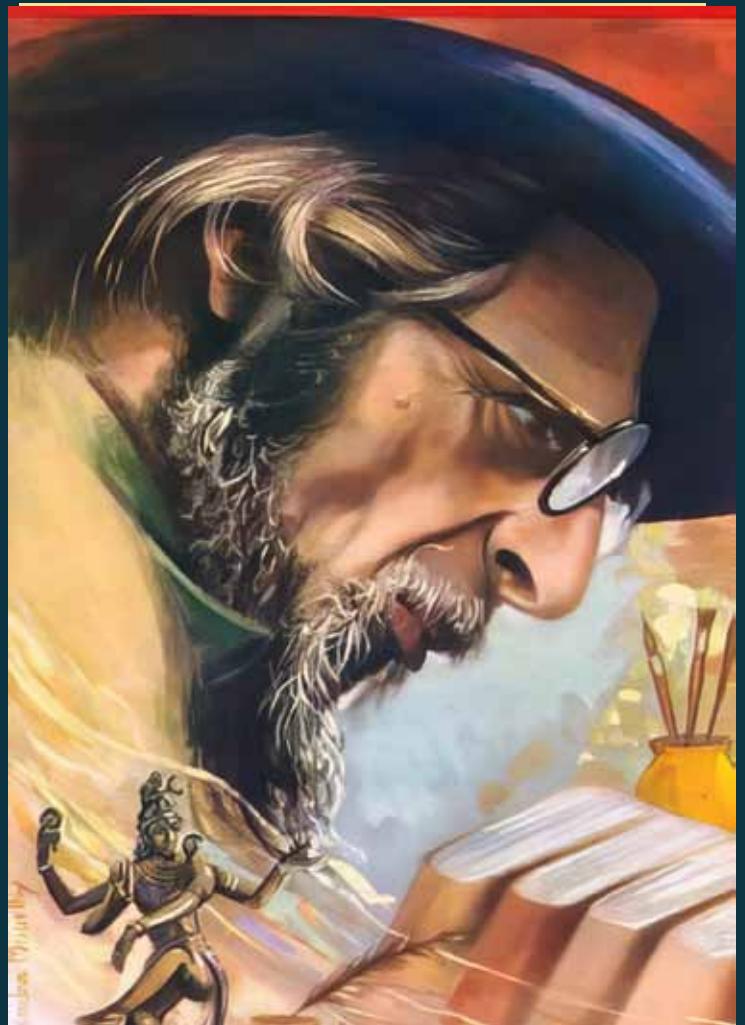
Ananda Coomaraswamy and His Four Wives Lost in Historical Records



By:
Sarawanan Komathi Nadarasa

It can be firmly stated that no other Sri Lankan has been subjected to global scholarly scrutiny to the extent that Ananda Coomaraswamy has. No other multi-talented Sri Lankan scholar has achieved such worldwide fame. Despite the vast knowledge available globally about Ananda Coomaraswamy, it is evident that there have not been comprehensive records about the remarkable women who were his wives. Through their lives, it becomes clear that Coomaraswamy's love and involvement with these women were not merely due to physical attraction or sexual desire. Ananda Coomaraswamy significantly supported and refined the personalities of these four women.

Similarly, the contributions of these four women were indispensable to the success of all of Coomaraswamy's work. He



collaborated with all four of them in his artistic and literary endeavors. He effectively utilized their talents in his artistic, literary, and research activities. The works he created in this manner were published with the names of his wives alongside his own.

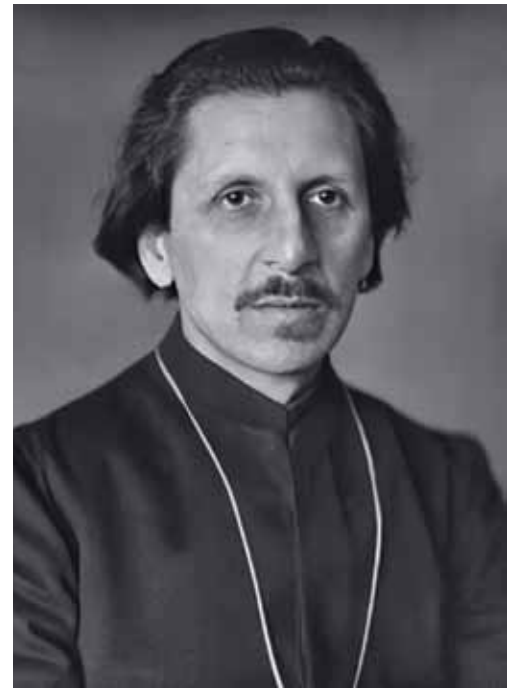
In other words, it is reasonable to question whether Ananda Coomaraswamy could have achieved worldwide fame or accomplished so many works and achievements without the support of these four women. However, detailed records about these women are not available as a comprehensive collection anywhere. Instead, it is necessary to gather information piecemeal from various books and articles, extracting bits from here and there.

Ethel Mary Coomaraswamy

Ethel Mary Coomaraswamy (Ethel Mary Mairet, February 17, 1872 - November 18, 1952) is globally known as a British handloom weaver. When discussing the development of handicrafts in the first half of the twentieth century, it is impossible to overlook Ethel Mary's role.

Ethel Mary Partridge was born in 1872 in Devon, England. She was educated domestically and later qualified to teach at the Royal Academy of Music in 1899, specializing in piano.

She married Ananda Coomaraswamy on June 19, 1902. At that time, Ethel was five years older than Ananda Coomaraswamy. The couple traveled to Sri Lanka, where Ananda Coomaraswamy joined a mineral research project. During this period, he wrote several articles on Sri Lanka's mineral resources, which were published in various scholarly journals. His research began in this field. They stayed in a bungalow near the city of Kandy. ¹The couple documented the arts and crafts of every village they visited. They recorded details about each craft they observed and took photographs. After five years, they returned to England in 1907 and published their research on Sri Lanka's handicrafts.



¹ Coatts, Margot, A weaver's life : Ethel Mairet, 1872-1952, London : Crafts Council ; Bath : In association with the Crafts Study Centre, Publication date 1983

Until 1910, they lived in Broad Campden. There, they collaborated with artisans like the architectural craftsman Charles Robert Ashbee to form and operate a group of craftsmen. Later, the couple revisited India and Sri Lanka to continue their artistic work.

Ethel independently learned the arts of weaving, dyeing, and spinning yarn. At a time when weaving by women was limited to household needs, she presented it as an art form and a professional craft. She became a significant role model for women interested in weaving and gained fame in the field.

In 1909, Ethel returned to England and conducted her first experiments in weaving and dyeing in Campden. She studied books on vegetable dyes at the Bodleian Library in Oxford and sought out places to learn weaving. Her knowledge of dyeing and creating color patterns through sewing might have been influenced by her father, a chemist, and her husband, Ananda Coomaraswamy, a botanist.

In December 1910, Ethel and Ananda Coomaraswamy traveled to India to continue their artistic work and research, writing about their discoveries. In 1910, Coomaraswamy openly engaged in another romantic relationship, which led to the end of his marriage with Ethel.

Ethel later built a house near Barnstaple with studios for dyeing and weaving. In 1913, she married Philip Mairet, and together they established The Thatched House, a communal home and studio. Her dream of a weaving workshop became a reality. Mahatma Gandhi visited her the following year, knowing about her work in Sri Lanka and India. Gandhi was keenly interested in using simple techniques for spinning khadi cloth in India.

In 1916, she published a book titled "A Book on Vegetable Dyes" in London, which is still celebrated as one of the pioneering books in the field. In 1917, she revised and expanded the book with additional details.

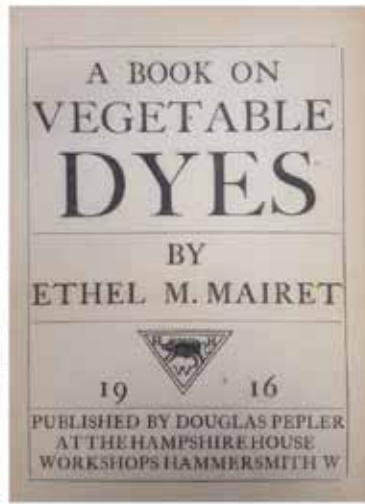
During the 1930s and 1940s, she provided training in weaving and dyeing at her studio, passing on her expertise to the next generation of artists.

Her dedication and innovation in the field brought her recognition in many countries. In 1937, she received the Royal Society of Arts honorary award, becoming the first woman to receive this honor. In 1939 she published "Handweaving Today" and taught at the Brighton School of Art from 1939 to 1947.

Throughout her life, Ethel remained active in her field, continuously guiding students and sending samples of her work to schools nationwide.

Ethel Mairet continues to influence generations of weavers. Her biography in the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography refers to her as the "mother of English handloom weaving." Her works are still displayed in museums, along with documents and memorabilia from 1872-1952. These include personal documents, travel journals from 1910-1938, commercial and personal correspondence, account books, and photographs. Her works are still part of educational curricula today.

She married Ananda Coomaraswamy on June 19, 1902, but they divorced in 1913. Ethel passed away in 1952 and was buried at St. Nicholas Church in Brighton.



Translator of the Mahavamsa

Although Ananda Coomaraswamy had a family background of Jaffna Tamil and English heritage, he is predominantly celebrated by the Sinhalese Buddhist community today. His research is still admired not only in the Eastern world but also in the Western world. His role in introducing Eastern arts, cultures, and literatures to the West is extensive.

In Sri Lanka's government school curriculum, the 9th-grade Sinhala language textbook includes 12 pages about Ananda Coomaraswamy. Even in Tamil textbooks, there is not as much detailed information about him. His works and books written in English have been translated into many languages. Most of his books have been translated into Sinhala, whereas only a few have been translated into Tamil. In other words, Ananda Coomaraswamy is not as well known in the Tamil community as he is in the Sinhalese community.

No other Sri Lankan has conducted as extensive research on Sinhalese heritage, culture, and literature as Ananda Coomaraswamy. This is why his works on the rediscovery of Sinhalese Buddhist community history are still celebrated by the Sinhalese community today.

In 1905, Wilhelm Geiger first brought the

"Dipavamsa Mahavamsa" from Pali into German.² Within the next three years, Ethel Mary Coomaraswamy translated it into English.³ Subsequently, Wilhelm Geiger, with the assistance of Mabel Haynes Bode, translated the Mahavamsa separately, which was published in 1912.⁴ Thus, the history of the Mahavamsa shows its translation from Pali to German, from German to English, and finally from English to Sinhala. While the names of everyone involved in the translation of the Mahavamsa, from Geiger to Mabel Haynes Bode, are deeply etched in history, Ethel Coomaraswamy, who first translated it into English, is not mentioned in any subsequent editions of the Mahavamsa. It is surprising to note that even in the 6th volume of the Mahavamsa published by the Sri Lankan government, while all the aforementioned names are mentioned, Ethel's name is conspicuously absent. Notably, she is not acknowledged anywhere in Sinhala records.⁵

² German of Wilhelm Geiger, *Dipavamsa und Mahavamsa und die geschichtliche überlieferung in Ceylon* (Leipzig: Wilhelm Tägeger, 1905).

³ *The Dipavamsa and Mahavamsa and their Historical Development in Ceylon* by Geiger Wilhelm; Translated in to English by Coomaraswamy M Ethel, C. Cottle (Colombo) Government Printer, Ceylon, 1908

⁴ *The Mahavamsa, or, The great chronicle of Ceylon / translated into English by Wilhelm Geiger, assisted by Mabel Haynes Bode*, London: Published for the Pali Text Society by Henry Frowde, Oxford University Press, 1912

⁵ Margot Coatts, *A weaver's life: Ethel Mairet 1872-1952. A study of Ethel Mairet and her workshops*. Crafts Study Centre, 1983.

Moreover, Wilhelm Geiger did not mention Ethel's assistance in the translation anywhere in the "Dipavamsa Mahavamsa." Due to the lack of records acknowledging Ethel's contribution to the Mahavamsa, her involvement is not even mentioned in the book "A Weaver's Life: Ethel Mairet 1872-1952," which elaborates on her life.

In the same year, 1908, Ananda Coomaraswamy's book "Mediaeval Sinhalese Art" was published. It was his first book. Ethel's translation of the Mahavamsa had already been published before that. The book "Mediaeval Sinhalese Art" is a significant work celebrated by the Sinhalese community. In this book, Ananda Coomaraswamy references the Mahavamsa in many places. The Sinhala edition of this book has seen many reprints over the years.⁶ It is noted in textbooks for its historical importance as the first book to place Sri Lanka's artistic heritage on the world map.

His works and his contributions are considered significant in various university curricula. Notably, more is taught about him in Sinhala language textbooks than in Tamil language textbooks.

He married Ethel Mary in 1902 and lived with her until 1913. Despite being together for 11 years, they did not have any children. In 1907, Alice Ethel joined the Coomaraswamy couple's art group to work with them during this period. The following year, Ananda Coomaraswamy began a romantic relationship with Alice. Finally, Ananda Coomaraswamy openly told his wife, Ethel, that he intended to marry a second time. Ethel, who had not expected such a revelation, was shocked and left the house upon hearing it.⁷

⁶ Sinhala Language, 9th year school text book, "Ananda Coomaraswamy."

⁷ Crooks, Edward. John Cage's Entanglement with the Ideas of Coomaraswamy. York University. (July 2011), pp. 66–67.



Apart from the articles she co-authored with Ananda Coomaraswamy, Ethel's books can be listed as follows:

- Old Sinhalese Embroidery. 1906
- The Dipavamsa and Mahavamsa and Their Historical Development in Ceylon by Geiger Wilhelm; Translated into English by Coomaraswamy M Ethel, C. Cottle (Colombo) Government Printer, Ceylon, 1908
- A Book on Vegetable Dyes. Douglas Pepler at the Hampshire House Workshops, Hammersmith, gutenberg.org. (1916)
- Hand-weaving Today, Traditions and Changes: By Ethel Mairet,... Faber and Faber. (1939)

Ratan Devi (1913–1922)

Ananda Coomaraswamy's second wife, known as Ratan Devi, was actually Alice Ethel Richardson. Seeing that name, one might assume she was Tamil, but that is not the case. Ratan Devi's real name was Alice Ethel Richardson, and she was born in England in 1889. Ananda Coomaraswamy and Alice had two children, a son named Narada Coomaraswamy and a daughter named Rohini Coomaraswamy.

Ananda and Alice lived on a houseboat in Srinagar, Kashmir, India. Coomaraswamy studied Rajput painting, while Alice learned Indian music from Abdul Rahim of Kapurthala. As a result, in 1916, she published two volumes titled "Rajput Paintings."⁸ Upon their return to England, Alice performed Indian songs on various stages under the name "Ratan Devi." During this successful journey, they undertook many tours, where Alice would sing after Ananda Coomaraswamy's speeches.

In 1913, Ananda Coomaraswamy and Alice co-authored and published the book "Thirty Songs from the Punjab and Kashmir." They dedicated this book to their eldest son, Narada, whom they had long awaited.⁹ This book boasts two notable features: first, the songs include musical notation; second, the introduction was written by Rabindranath Tagore. During Ananda Coomaraswamy's visits to Calcutta, he stayed with Tagore as his guest. Tagore wrote a laudatory introduction about Alice's singing. The book received excellent reviews not only from newspapers but also from renowned personalities such as composer Percy Grainger, playwright George Bernard Shaw, and poet W.B. Yeats.¹⁰

Additionally, Ratan Devi published another book titled "Book of Words of Classic East Indian Ragas and Kashmiri Folk Songs Sung by Ratan Devi (Mrs. Ananda K. Coomaraswamy) in her Costume Recitals." This was published in New York by the J. B. Pond Lyceum Bureau.



On October 14, 1916, the renowned American magazine Musical America mentioned the Kashmir music journey of Ananda and Ratan Devi as follows:

'In the latter half of 1915-1916, one could witness the very interesting music programs featuring East Indian traditional ragas and Kashmiri folk songs by Ratan Devi and Dr. Ananda Coomaraswamy. The interest in these artists was so high that they could not meet all the demands. Therefore, they have decided to undertake a second American tour, which will begin on January 1.'¹¹

In the same year, 1916, another American magazine published a detailed article about Ratan Devi's work in understanding, experiencing, and promoting Indian music. The article praised her elegance in playing

⁸ Ananda Coomaraswamy, *Rajput Painting: Being an Account of the Hindu Paintings of Rajasthan and the Panjab Himalayas from the Sixteenth to the Nineteenth Century Described in Their Relation to Contemporary Thought with Texts and Translations*; Humphrey. Milford, 1916.

⁹ Roger Lipsey, *Coomaraswamy: His Life and Work* Princeton Univ Press; 1st edition (January 1, 1977)

¹⁰ Crooks, Edward (July 2011). *John Cage's Entanglement with the Ideas of Coomaraswamy* (PDF). York University.

¹¹ Musical America 1916-10-14: Vol 24 Iss. 24

Indian music on the piano.¹² Considering the news and articles published in various American magazines, it is evident¹³ that their contribution to introducing Eastern music, particularly Indian music, to Western audiences over a century ago is significant. Their work continues to be referenced in many studies today.

By 1917, their marital life had fractured. They initially lived separately and later divorced formally. Ananda Coomaraswamy explained his philosophical understanding of marriage and the reasons for his divorce in his book "The Dance of Shiva," under the essay titled "The Status of Indian Women."¹⁴ He further explored his views and quests regarding domestic life and renunciation in his philosophical writings. His books like "Buddha and the Gospel of Buddhism" serve as examples of this exploration.

Stella Bloch

Ananda Coomaraswamy's third wife, Stella Bloch, married him in 1922 when she was 25 and he was 45, a 20-year age difference. They lived together until 1930. Born in 1897, Stella was an American dancer, journalist, and talented painter. She passed away on January 10, 1999, just before her 101st birthday, having lived for 71 years after their divorce.

Stella Bloch met Ananda Coomaraswamy in America when she was 17 years old. She



traveled with him to learn about Eastern arts. They visited countries like Bali, Cambodia, China, India, Java, and Japan to learn about the arts there. During this period, it was Ratan Devi who taught her Indian dances.

Some of the famous photographs of Ananda Coomaraswamy were taken by Stella Bloch. Similarly, a well-known photograph of Stella that still exists today was taken by Ananda Coomaraswamy. Stella Bloch wrote and published a book titled "Dancing and the Drama East and West" in 1922, the same year they got married. The cover of this book bears the words "With an Introduction by Ananda Coomaraswamy." However, the introduction inside is dated 1921, indicating it was written a year before their marriage.

Though the book is quite short, with only 38 pages, after excluding the blank pages, Ananda Coomaraswamy's 3-page introduction, and the 8 individual pages with illustrations, the actual content is just 13 pages. This short essay, containing fewer than 2,400 English words, was published as a book. All the line drawings in the book were done by Stella herself.

12 Hadland, F. A. (1916): 'Indian Music: Ratan Devi's Recital'. Review of concert performance by Ratan Devi, Æolian Hall, London. The Musical Times, 1st January, 1916 (vol. 57), 27-28.

13 New York Times (1916): 'A Concert of Indian Music: Ratan Devi Sings Classical Ragas and Kashmiri Folk Songs'. Review of concert performance by Ratan Devi, Princess Theatre, New York. 14 April, 7.

14 Ananda Coomaraswamy, "Status of Indian Women," in The Dance of Shiva, pp. 103-104.



After separating from Coomaraswamy in 1931, Stella married American lyricist, producer, and actor Edward Eliscu. She wrote numerous research articles and produced many works while working at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. Her paintings were used as logos for African American music productions, and her artworks are preserved at Princeton University and the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. Viswanath, who wrote a book about her, noted that her house in Needham, Boston, was like a museum, filled with art objects from around the world.¹⁵

The details of the five articles she co-authored with Ananda Coomaraswamy can be found in a compilation of Coomaraswamy's works¹⁶ prepared by Dr. Rama Ponnampalam Coomaraswamy.

Examples of Stella's books and articles include:

- Introduction to Dancing and Drama in East and West by Stella Bloch, New York, 1922.

¹⁵ Vishwanath S. Naravane, Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, Twayne Publishers, 1978

¹⁶ Dr. Rama P. Coomaraswamy, "Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy A Working Bibliography", Department of Culture Lalit Kala Akademi New Delhi, 1976.

- The Appreciation of Art (with Stella Bloch). The Art Bulletin, (Providence, R. I.), VI, 1923, pp. 61-64.
- Medieval and Modern Hinduism (with Stella Bloch), Asia, (New York), XXIII, No. 3, 1923, pp. 203-206 and 230, 4 figs.
- The Chinese Theatre in Boston (with Stella Bloch), Theatre Arts Monthly, (New York), IX, February 1925, pp. 113-122.
- The Javanese Theatre (with Stella Bloch), Asia, (New York), XXIX, 1929, pp. 536-539, 6 figs. Reprinted in Baker's Drama Gram, (Boston), VII, 1929, pp. 15-17 (as an abstract and without illustrations).

Luisa Runstein (Dona Luisa Runstein)

In the same year, Ananda Coomaraswamy divorced Stella, and he married Luisa Runstein from Argentina, with whom he lived until he died in 1947. They had a 28-year age gap. Coomaraswamy met Luisa at a communist protest in Cambridge. Her parents were Jewish immigrants to Argentina, and she came to America at 16. Known as Xlata Llamas (Lotte Lamas), she was a prominent photographer.

Many of the photographs of Ananda Coomaraswamy that we have today were taken by Luisa. Her photography collection also includes beautiful photographs of Rabindranath Tagore. Some of these photographs were signed by Tagore himself. It is also known that the famous picture of Stella Bloch, Ananda Coomaraswamy's third wife, was taken by Luisa. Likewise, Luisa took the well-known side profile photograph of Ananda Coomaraswamy wearing a hat and leaning down, which was taken in 1937.

At that time, Luisa was only 25 years old. Their son, Rama Coomaraswamy, was born two years after their marriage. They lived for many years in a house near Boston. Although Rama



completed his early education at a conservative Hindu school in India, he later pursued higher education in the medical field and became a renowned doctor. Additionally, he converted to Christianity. He lived in countries like the United States and Canada for some time before moving to England, where he completed his postgraduate studies at Oxford and Harvard Colleges. He authored and published several research books on Christianity. Rama passed away in 2006 at the age of 75.

Luisa cared for Ananda Coomaraswamy with great concern until the end. She was also his assistant, helping with office work and research. It is noted that Luisa learned Hindi and Sanskrit in India. After Ananda Coomaraswamy's death, Luisa served as a guide to many who researched his works.

Ananda Coomaraswamy passed away on September 9, 1947, in America. His funeral was held at a Christian church, where eulogies by Luisa and their son, Rama Ponnampalam, were delivered. These speeches were later published in a memorial volume in 1952, five years after his death. The book, which contains

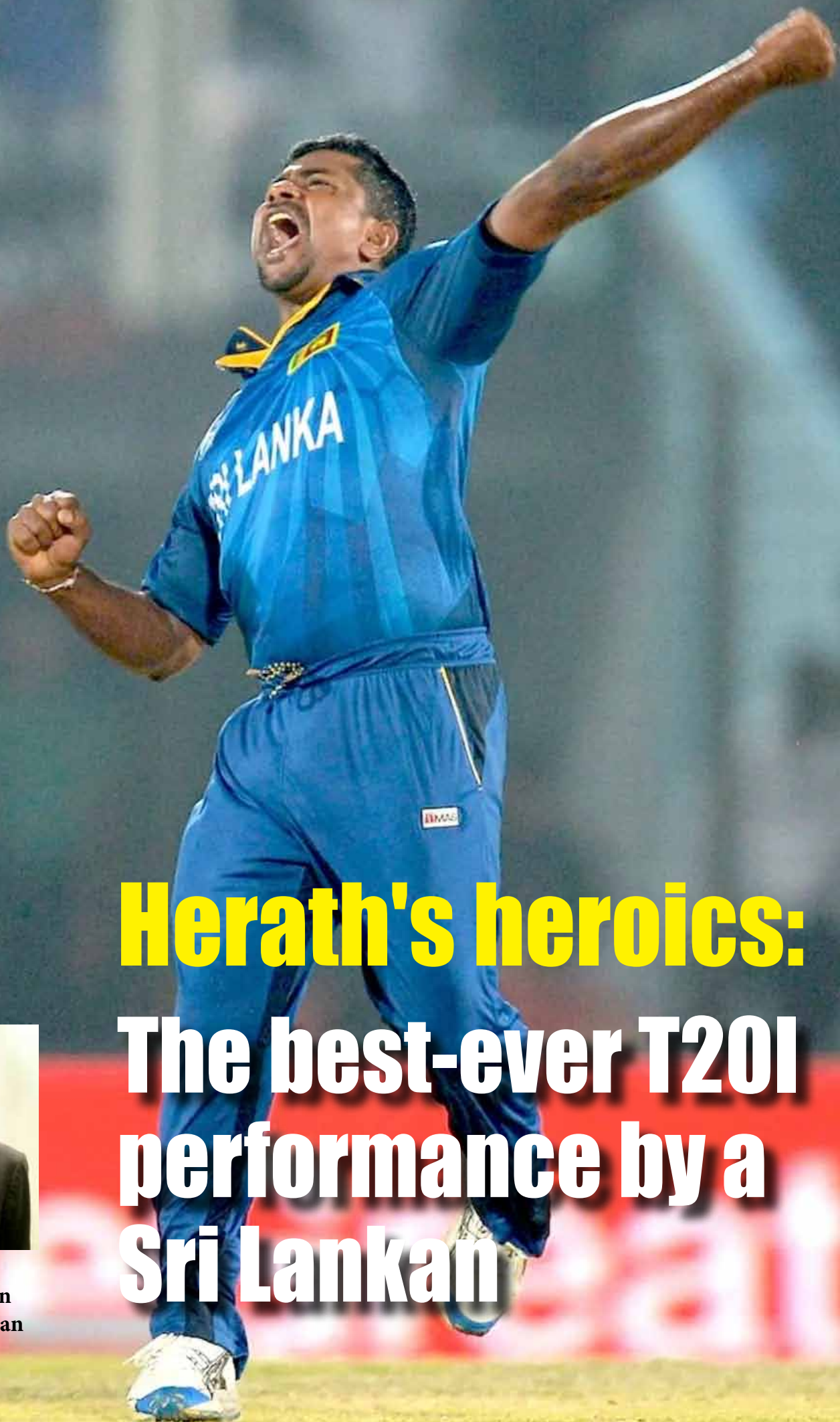
420 pages, includes tributes and articles from various individuals, including the then Prime Minister of Sri Lanka, D.S. Senanayake. It was compiled by Durairajasingam. In her eulogy, Luisa said:

"Coomaraswamy spent his entire life learning, seeking knowledge, and continuously striving to understand himself. In all these pursuits, our deep interest acted as iron particles and your love, as the magnet that drew us in."

It is unfortunate that detailed and clear records of Luisa's life, who lived with Ananda Coomaraswamy for the last 17 years of his life, are not readily available. Those who wish to search for her photographs and articles can look under the name Zlata Llamas.

Luisa was not only known as an excellent photographer, but her articles published in some research journals under the name Dora Luisa Coomaraswamy also reveal her profound depth as a creator.

Luisa passed away in 1969 at the age of 65



Herath's heroics: The best-ever T20I performance by a Sri Lankan



By:
**Dr. Aravinthan
Arunthavanathan**

Rangana Herath's remarkable spell of five wickets for three runs remains one of the most celebrated moments in World T20 history. If your memory of this brilliance has faded, or if you want to revisit one of the greatest comebacks in any format, here's a recollection of Rangana Herath's herculean feat, especially as the World T20 fever grips the cricket world.

Sri Lanka's World title dreams were rapidly disintegrating in Chittagong. In a do-or-die battle against the Kiwis, the Lankans had managed a paltry 119—a score not even close to competitive. The Kiwis were off to a solid start, adding 18 runs for the loss of just one wicket. Only a miracle could keep Sri Lanka alive in the tournament.

Miracles aren't rare in Sri Lankan cricket. However, their likelihood becomes even more remote on the world stage, where survival hangs in the balance. Miracles are typically the work of superstars like Angelo Mathews, Sanath Jayasuriya, Lasith Malinga, and others. Described as super strong and supremely skilled, these are the adjectives that define those who perform miracles. Yet, on that day, it was none of them. A burly spinner, only slightly taller than the score his team posted that day, was Sri Lanka's last hope. Rangana Herath was never the superstar known for supreme feats. But that day was different. A comeback win is always special, but those orchestrated by bowlers are even more so. Melbourne, Durban, Galle—the list of memorable wins in our history is long. Yet, for some reason, nothing could evoke the same excitement and thrill as what would unfold in Chittagong that day. In a knockout game on the world stage, with their backs against the wall and no realistic chance, Herath was set to wield the magic wand that nobody knew he possessed in the shortest format of the game.



The Kiwi dynamite McCullum did what he does best: trying to intimidate the bowlers. In an attempt to do so, McCullum misread the length and turn, ending up stumped in Herath's first over. A T20 maestro was made to look like an amateur trying his first dance skit by a spinner who was far from the T20 prototype. With Ross Taylor in the middle, the Kiwis were in safe hands. But Herath was in no mood to relent. A beautifully delivered arm ball, skidding off the glistening surface, trapped Taylor Plumb in front. The glimmer of hope was slowly but surely turning into rays of hope. Not only was he taking wickets, but Herath was also miserly with the runs. Neesham was the next victim of a perfect delivery from the off-spinner. Lured into the drive and beaten by the lack of pace, he was bowled through the famous gate. Herath was imparting his Midas touch on the proceedings. Suddenly, the Kiwis were left in a daze, not knowing what was transpiring in the middle. It was as if an alien power had engulfed an unsuspecting civilization. At 29-4, the game was not gone for the Kiwis, but it soon was to be. Luke Ronchi, the swashbuckling wicketkeeper-batsman, was squared up by a delivery that was angled in, pitched online, and straightened. As the umpire's finger went up, Sri Lankan hopes skyrocketed. Herath had caused havoc, sending the Kiwis into an avalanche, reducing them to 29-5. Despite



Williamson anchoring the innings and providing a fight, Herath's efforts were strong enough to outweigh the Kiwis. The wicket of Boult to polish off the Kiwi effort was a fitting end to a fabulous performance. As the ball landed in the safe palms of the ever-reliable Mahela at slip, Herath had orchestrated an unimaginable win, evoking feelings similar to the famous Kolkata triumph in 1996, though smaller in magnitude.

For a team to win a world tournament, moments must instill self-belief, signaling that something special is just around the corner. The Kotla chase in 1996 was one such moment that rejuvenated that year's campaign. Similarly, Herath's effort against all odds made

one believe Sri Lanka was on the cusp of a world title. In 2014, almost all the Lankans had gone unsold in the IPL auction due to a mix of skill-related and administrative factors. This indicated that the team was competitive but not considered a top contender. In that context, it was fitting that a team, seen at best as outsiders to clinch the title, went on to reach the pinnacle powered by an individual who would not have been imagined as capable of delivering such a stellar effort in the shortest format of the game. While there are many celebrated bowling feats in the annals of our cricket, Herath's superlative 5-3 not only matches other renowned feats, but its impact transcends into a different stratosphere.

The Very Internal Investigation

Translated from the
original Tamil short story
mika uḷḷaka vicāraṇai
(மிக உள்ளக விசாரணை)
by **Shobasakthi**

Translated by:
Eluttukkiṇiyavan
(எழுத்துக்கினியவன்)

There is one commonality and one difference between this story and the famous novel by Franz Kafka. They are both about judicial inquiries: the title of his novel is ‘The Trial’ and the title of this story is “The Very Internal Investigation.” The difference is that although Kafka’s hero was not afforded the honor of having his last name spelled out, at least Kafka denoted it by the letter ‘K.’ Our hero did not even deserve that. Now let us dive straight into our story.

This story begins abruptly with the discovery of a twenty-five year old mass grave from which eighty five human skulls and

heaps of human remains were excavated.

The village of Maṅkumpāṇ lies four miles from the city of Jaffna. That is where the primary center for drinking water supply for the Jaffna archipelago is located. In March of last year, work began to lay underground pipes for supplying drinking water to Puṅgudutīvu. Excavating the first two miles of ground from Maṅkumpāṇ to lay pipes is not a difficult task. The soil in Maṅkumpāṇ is soft, moist, almost flowery, fine sand. Digging the soil is as easy as digging water. But beyond two miles, the soil turns into a hardened mixture of clay and conch shells. Digging and laying down pipes becomes arduous. The village where such hard ground begins is called Ūripulam.

When the employees of the Water Supply and Drainage Board used modern heavy equipment to excavate the soil in Ūripulam, they discovered the mass grave with eighty five human skulls and other human remains. The police from Kayts showed up right away and set up barricades around the mass grave. Neither the public nor the media were allowed near the site. When a Tamil Member of Parliament attempted to push past the police barricade, a junior police officer pushed him back, causing a melee. That evening, it was reported, the police baton-charged the people who had thronged there from far and wide after the news about the mass grave had spread.

The next morning, the Jaffna District Judge, the forensic medical expert, the Director of the Archaeological Survey, the Archaeological Excavation Officer, and various senior police officers converged on the mass grave which was under vigilant police guard. They began a detailed examination of the evidence. After eight months of analysis, this team

could figure out the identities of neither the perpetrators nor the victims.

Associations for the Search of Missing Persons opined, “This mass grave is likely the handiwork of the military.” Some other organizations claimed, “The Tamil Tigers must have buried their victims here.” But neither side had any real evidence or eyewitnesses to back up their assertions. There were no gunshot wounds in any of the skulls, nor any other sign of injury. Not even a single spent bullet was found in the mass grave. Therefore, the entire investigation at the Jaffna District Court came to a standstill. The judge who was presiding over the investigation eventually retired from service.

At the beginning of this year, a person by the name Kaṇagasabai Thiyāgarām filed a petition at the Jaffna District Court. Thiyāgarām was from the village of Ūripulam where the mass grave was discovered. After the entire village was destroyed during the war, he was displaced to France. He had traveled to Sri Lanka on hearing the discovery of the mass grave in Ūripulam. His petition claimed that there was a well near the mass grave that had been filled with dirt, and that there may be more bodies buried inside the well. The petition asked for the well to be excavated. Many years ago, three brothers of Thiyāgarām’s had disappeared on the same day.

The petition came before the judges M. J. Nallaināthan and Eranga Kandewatta. They accepted the petition and ordered the well to be excavated. But it did not happen.

Thiyāgarām filed a second petition inquiring why the excavation was being delayed. When this petition came before the judges, the police explained that the well in question was built



by the Village Development Council whose permission was required before excavating the well, and that the police was having difficulty locating the Village Development Council administration.

The judges did not accept this explanation by the police. They ruled to grant the police special permission for excavation, bypassing the need for express approval by the long-defunct Village Development Council, and ordered that the work must begin immediately.

Seeing that the work still was not done, Thiyāgarām filed a third petition. The police informed the court, “Work was delayed because of the rainy season.” It was fixed that the work would begin on a specific date in April.

On that day, the work did not take place because the forensic medical expert had

unexpectedly gone on leave. Thiyāgarām did not give up. He filed yet another petition. This time the judges were incensed. The very next day, they summoned the officials from the thirteen government departments involved and ordered that on May 15, the well must be excavated in the presence of the two judges.

Two days before the excavation was to begin, Thiyāgarām was arrested by the secret police at a Jaffna lodge. He had spoken about the excavation at the press association in Jaffna. The police found this to be a major offense. On the grounds that it was illegal for Thiyāgarām, a French citizen, to speak to the media about local political matters in Sri Lanka, they deported him to France. Hardly anyone noticed this development. The poet V. I. S. Jayapalen was the only one who commented on the matter on Facebook. “The Sri Lankan government arrested and deported me just as they did Thiyāgarām. When my country undergoes a new dawn, sunflowers

will blossom in the graveyards on our soil to welcome me back home,” he wrote with hope.

On the morning of the fifteenth of May, judges Nallaināthan and Kandewatta left Jaffna in the same vehicle and headed to Ūripulam via the Paṇṇai bridge. Both were convinced that they were carrying out their duties as judges correctly and justly. Kandewatta grasped Nallaināthan’s hand and gently squeezed it. It was a symbolic gesture meant to convey the message, ‘We will stand on the side of justice without fearing anyone. Be brave!’

Nallaināthan was the quintessential Point Pedro Tamil. Kandewatta was a descendant of Uyana Puran Appu, who rebelled against the British colonial masters in the nineteenth century. Both of them had a close, long-standing friendship. They attended Colombo Law College together and served together as lawyers at a court in Colombo. They were appointed judges on the same day. Kandewatta’s Tamil was as perfect as Nallaināthan’s flawless Sinhala. Kandewatta arrived in Jaffna in the same month as when Nallaināthan was transferred to Jaffna.

The judges’ vehicle left the Paṇṇai bridge and drove through Maṅkumpāṇ to reach Ūripulam. Nallaināthan was returning to Ūripulam after a gap of about forty years. On his previous visits, Ūripulam was a picturesque seaside village that could have been taken out of a painting. Now it was overgrown with young palm trees and shrubbery. The only evidence of prior human habitation was the small, dilapidated, low-walled Vairavar temple. Someone from Maṅkumpāṇ used to show up every day to light an oil lamp at the temple. But the discovery of the mass grave, and the subsequent round-the-clock patrolling by the police and the military had ensured that there

was no longer anyone coming by every day to light a lamp at the temple.

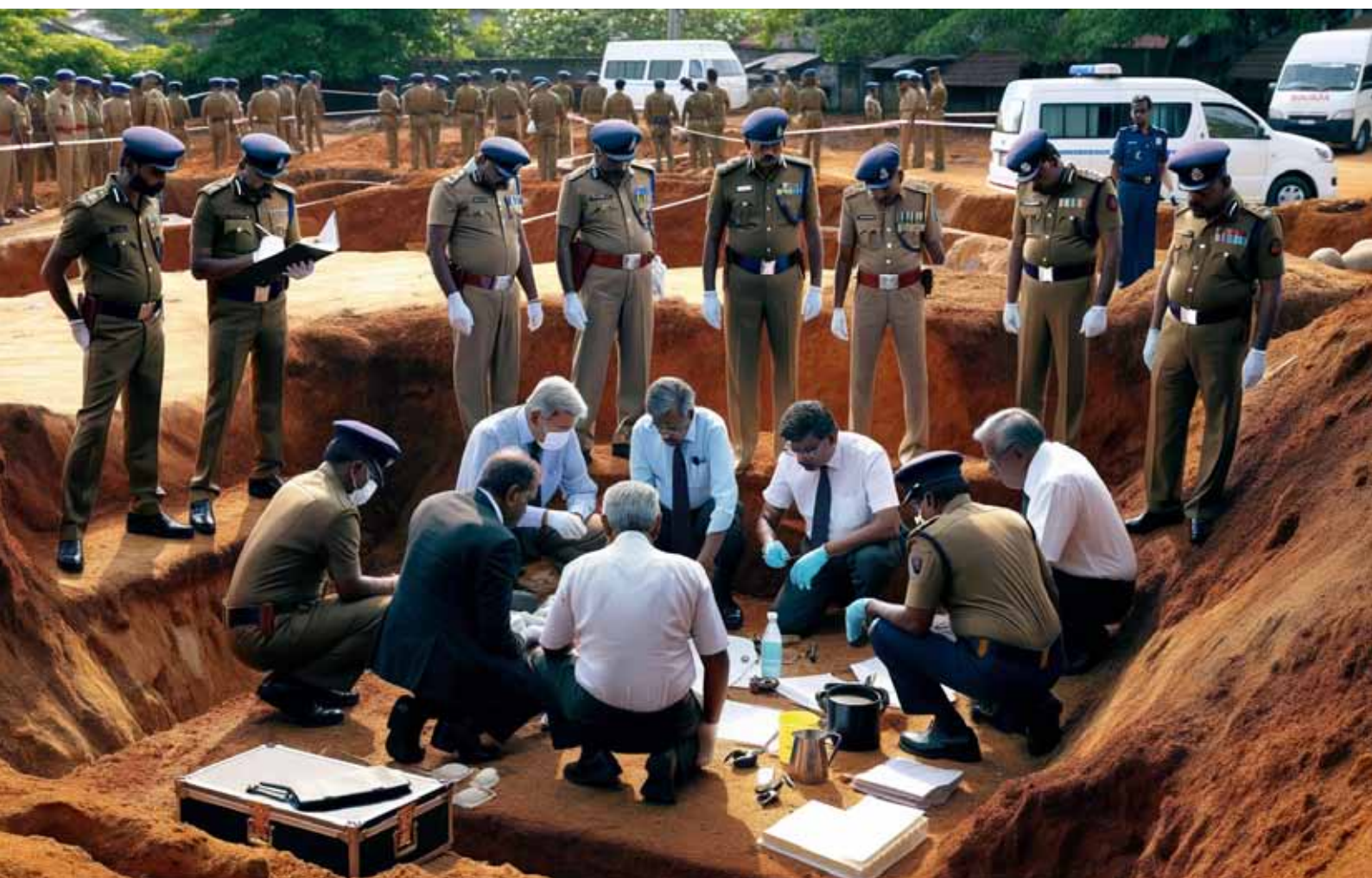
Nallaināthan began recounting to Kandewatta his recollections of earlier visits to Ūripulam. When he was studying in Jaffna, Nallaināthan often went to the white beach with friends to bathe in the sea. One has to go past Ūripulam to get to the white beach. Ūripulam was a tiny, lone village surrounded by thick palmyra woods on three sides and the sea on the south side. The palmyra toddy from Ūripulam was considered superior even to the renowned Kūvil toddy. Whenever they visited the white beach, Nallaināthan and his friends always stopped by at Ūripulam for some toddy. When he was younger, Nallaināthan was anemic. So, he had the habit of consuming pure toddy in small amounts to strengthen his body.

Nallaināthan climbed down from the vehicle and looked up at the tall palmyra trees. They were full of dried leaves and rotten petioles. There was no sign of humans as far as the eye could see. It was an abandoned piece of land, after the entire village was shattered and its inhabitants were displaced.

Having learnt from the chaos that resulted when the mass grave was excavated the previous year, the police had arranged for heightened security. Not even a dog could wander in without their knowledge. Starting from two days prior to the planned excavation date, the police had completely barred the public or media from entering Ūripulam.

A tent had been set up next to the well with chairs and desks for the judges and other functionaries. Once the judges gave the order, the workers quickly started their machinery and got on with the excavation.

It was a parapet well with a surrounding



wall. The experts who accompanied the judges surmised that there had been a thick hexagonal surrounding wall standing at the height of three feet from ground level. The wall had been demolished and pushed inside the well which had then been filled to the surface level with clay and conch soil. The machinery quickly removed the soil.

As Nallaināthan was cleaning his eyeglasses, Kandewatta leaned over to ask softly, “Do you think we will find something inside?” Nallaināthan pondered this for a while and said, “Looking at the state of this village, I think the entire village is inside this well.”

Kandewatta extended his hand to grab Nallaināthan’s and squeezed it lightly. His face had darkened. He murmured to himself, “Is there yet another unsolvable case awaiting us inside this well?”

The experts who had already estimated that the well was not deep, turned out to be correct. Within a depth of twenty feet, gaps began to be visible. Huge chunks of the surrounding wall had piled on top of one another. When the machinery lifted the wall chunks out, the water level became visible. There were moss and ferns growing along the inner walls of the well. Some aquatic plants had grown amidst these. When the machinery lifted a huge slab of concrete, something odd inside the well became visible.

Nallaināthan and Kandewatta immediately ordered the excavation to be halted. Two thick ropes were lowered into the well and two strong men climbed down the well. Once inside, they yelled out from the depths of the well with a mixture of fear and surprise:

“There is a man alive here.”

It is not important for this little story to dwell in detail on how the judges felt on hearing this, or how the forensic experts reacted, or what the Director of the Archaeological Survey guessed, or the consternation that spread among the police. Instead, let us end the first half of this story here, and proceed to the second half.

2

The horizon was turning red, and darkness was beginning to engulf Ūripulam as they lowered a long wide plank on four strong ropes and lifted the man out of the ruined well. The man was laid down on a rubber sheet inside the judges’ tent. The doctors who examined the man reported back to the judges in astonishment that he appeared to be in reasonable health. Nallaināthan gently squeezed Kandewatta’s hand. Then, he summoned a policeman and asked him to go light a lamp at the Vairavar temple visible in the distance. He then peered in silence into the darkness towards the sea. Once he spotted the tiny flame flickering into life, he let out a huge sigh.

Outside the tent, police jostled one another forming a protective ring around the tent. Doctors and archeologists sat on the chairs outside the tent and started smoking. The two judges sat on their chairs, illuminated by the soft glow of the lone lamp lit inside the tent.

The man who was discovered alive sat up slowly. The doctors had wrapped his naked body up in a new white blanket. He was taking deep breaths noisily. His two eyes set in his black face covered in a thicket of hair, rolled around like duck eggs in the low light.

Having explained in detail who they were and

what was going on, the judges slowly began their judicial investigation.

“First of all, what is your name?”

“I don’t know, *aiyā*.”

“Don’t you have a name?”

“How can I be without a name? But since no one has called me by my name for a long time, I have forgotten it. No matter how hard I rack my brains, I can’t seem to be able to recall my name.”

“What about your parents?”

“My mother’s name is Annam. My father’s name is Chellaiyā. I have four sisters and five brothers. Since I have been thinking of them constantly, I have not forgotten any of their names.”

“How long have you been in this well?”

“I don’t know, *aiyā*.”

“Do you remember the date when you entered this well?”

“Very clearly. Saturday, the 22nd of August in 1990 was my twenty-fourth birthday. Already the previous evening, my younger sister had given me the hand-made birthday card she made from white cardboard. My bad luck started when I went to light the lamp at the Vairavar temple that night, Friday night, that is. As long as I was outside, I was the one who lit the lamp at the temple every evening. My family has done this for generations. My great grandfather Murukēsu had built the temple.”

“You remember all this.. But cannot remember your own name?”



“*Aiyā*, even as I answer your questions, I keep trying to remember my name.”

The judges were served tea. When the man was served tea, he pouted his lips to blow on the tea noisily as he drank it. The judges resumed the inquiry.

“Tell us in detail about yourself and how you came to be inside this well. But before that, finish drinking your tea.

The man set the cup with the remaining tea down on the sand and started telling his story. His was not a particularly interesting story. It was a story that had been told repeatedly. But as evidence, the story is very important to the judges as well to us.

“When I was young, I remember reading a story about a fly that had forgotten its name. My story seems to be similar. I hardly left this village. The prevailing situation in the country was not amenable to venturing outside either. I went to school until grade ten. I tried taking

the grade ten examination twice but failed in all subjects. My sisters scolded me as a complete idiot, and my father called me a lazy bum. My mother said, “he is a type.” I had no interest in working or earning money. But from childhood, I was pious and had a great interest in social service. This may be hereditary. My grandfather Kadirkāmu was also said to have been very keen on public service. It was said that he was responsible for laying down the gravel road towards the white beach. Before that, there were no roads in Ūripulam.

I was at the forefront of establishing the ‘Tiruvalluvar Library.’ It may be just a thatched hut, and it may be that it received just one newspaper every day, but it was a center where the youth gathered to socialize. After fighting with the Indian Peace Keeping Force broke out, no food was delivered to the Jaffna archipelago for three months. I led the youth of the village in making porridge for the entire village every morning. We also led all sorts of other community activities like school sports meets, the Vairavar temple festival, and

voluntary *shramadāna* activities.

After the fighting had resumed, a corpse would wash ashore at the Ūripulam seashore at least once a week. Having been in the brackish seawater for many days, these corpses would be pale and swollen. Some would have gunshot wounds. They would lie on the seashore like huge balloons, their flesh peeling off at the touch. No one would know if a corpse belonged to a Tamil, a Sinhalese, or an Indian. No one would be ready to bury the bodies. It was we, the youth of the ‘Tiruvalluvar Library,’ who would dig graves on the shore to bury the bodies.

Two youths from the village went to join a militant group in 1984. One day during the rainy season, their bodies were found in this well. No one knew if they were suicides or murders. Thereafter, no one from our village joined militant groups. The groups did not frequent the village often either.

If you asked about the military, then until August 1990, they did not set foot in Ūripulam. This was just a tiny village of a hundred huts. On the twenty-first of August, the military landed in the entire archipelago. News quickly spread that they were advancing without meeting any resistance. There was no escape in any direction. People fled their homes to seek refuge in public buildings. All of Ūripulam deserted the village to flee to the white beach. We gathered at the Guru Bawa mosque awaiting the arrival of the military. But we were confident that the military would not attack a mosque. The elders responsible for the mosque felt the same. By midday, there was no sign of the military. We had no way to know where the military was. The mosque elders arranged for lunch to be prepared in big vessels. It was there that my younger sister drew the birthday card for me.

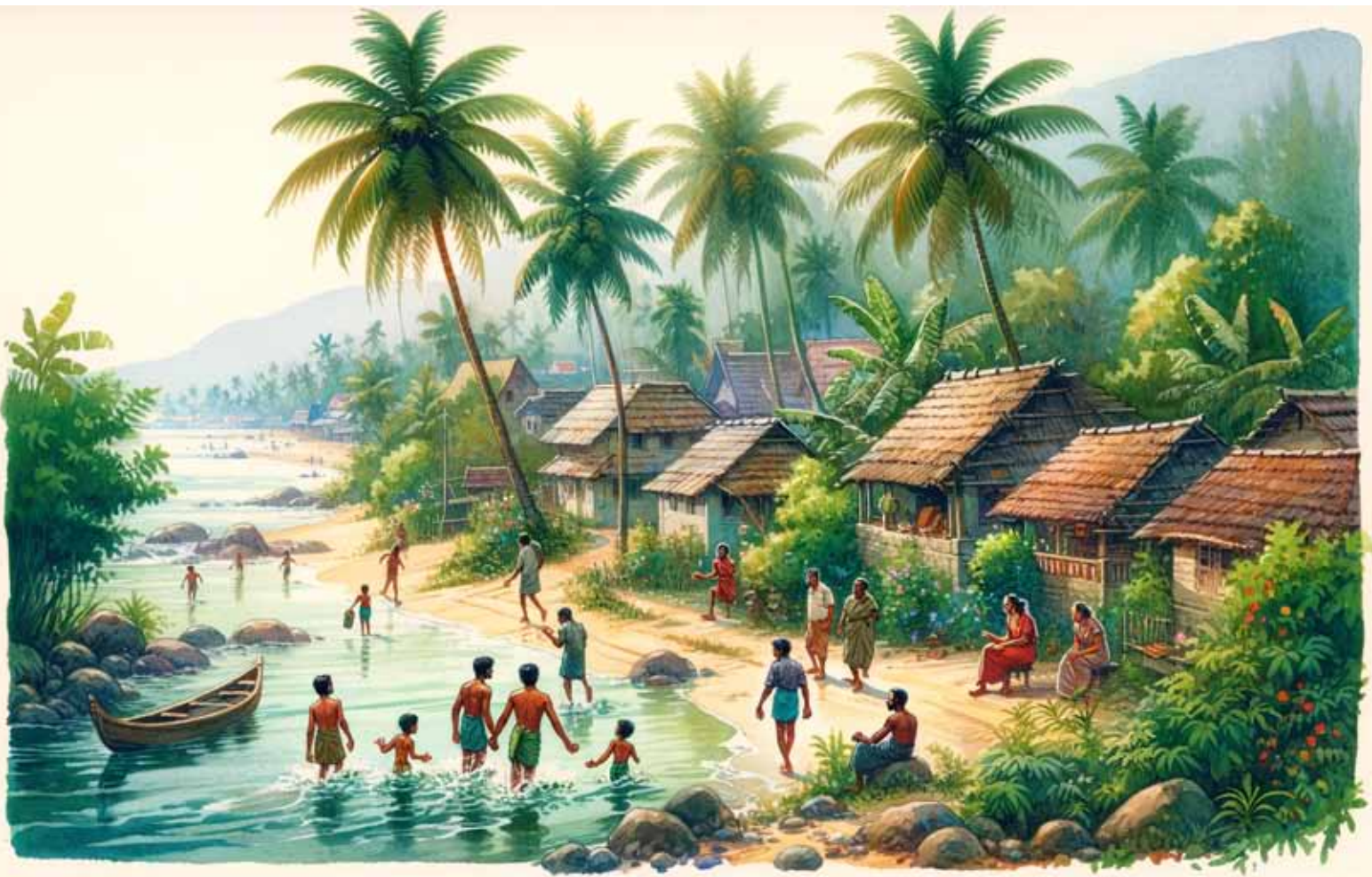
Things had normalized to a great extent by sundown that it was natural to think about birthday greetings. People thought they could spend the night at the mosque and return home in the morning.

The sun set and the reddish twilight filled the horizon. They started *adhan*, the call for the sunset prayer, the *maghrib*. When I heard that, I started to worry that my Vairavar was without a lamp that day. To leave the guard deity of Ūripulam without light on a day, a Friday at that, could bring ill fortune to the entire village. Once that thought entered my head, I left the mosque quietly, without telling anyone, and started to make my way along the shore towards Ūripulam.

The seashore was covered with thickets of screw pines and wild date palms. So, I walked carefully through them, concealing myself in the overgrowth, and checking from time to time if I could spot any sign of the military. By the time I reached Ūripulam, it was completely dark. I went into my home to pick up the bottle of oil and a box of matches and walked towards the Vairavar temple. Nothing stirred along the way.

I waded into the sea to wash my hands and feet and lit the lamp in front of Vairavar’s trident. The temple had a short wall, a small pedestal, and a single trident. It looked as if the entire village was lit up by the tiny, single flame. A great sense of calm descended into my heart. It was then that I noticed the military. They emerged from the darkness silently and stood in the lamp light. My hands were tied behind my back. I was marched to this well and was made to sit on the ground. I was not beaten or otherwise harmed. From here, I could see the flame in the temple.

I could hear the rustle of human figures



moving about around me. I peered into the darkness to get a sense of what was going on. It seemed like the army was all over the landscape. A soldier came to me to ask if I wanted water. I nodded. He drew water from this very well and poured it on me. I drank like a fish. He asked me to lie down. Because my hands were tied behind my back, I could not lie on my stomach or back. So, I lay on my side and thought about the possibility of escape. There was no chance. The sounds of people walking about and conversing in Sinhala came from all directions. The distant sounds of vehicles gradually became louder. I closed my eyes. As soon as I closed my eyes, it felt like my body was glowing. I imagined that the spark I lit for Vairavar was glowing in my heart. I spent the night drawing comfort from that confidence.

Only when it was dawn could I see that Ūripulam was filled with the military

overnight. I sat up slowly and looked around. There were many people lying down, or sitting up, with hands tied behind their backs. Strangely, the knowledge that I was not the only one to be detained by the military gave me a sort of comfort.

Although armed soldiers stood guard around us, they did not trouble us in any way. If one were to find fault, we could say that they did not give us food or water the entire day. Throughout the day, they brought in captives from all over the area, from Maṇdaitīvu, from Maṇkumpāṇ, from Allaipiddi, and from Vēlaṇai. They were marched here in small groups, their hands tied behind their backs. At high noon, my two brothers and some others were brought. The elders from the mosque were with them.

We spoke amongst ourselves in low voices. The military did not stop us from speaking.

Some said they would interrogate us and let us leave. Some others said they would load all of us up on a ship and send us off to the dreaded Boosa detention camp.

Soon they made us sit down in nine rows because a senior military official was about to come to see us. We were eighty-six in total. The official came by and looked at us without any sign of emotion on his face. It barely took a minute. He then walked along the seashore.

A little later, I saw the soldiers drive two big machines towards us. They started digging a huge hole a short distance from us in the clay and conch soil. Dust rose above the palmyra treetops. The noise from the machines deafened us. The smoke and the smell of burning diesel nauseated us. We all understood what was about to happen.

The sun was sinking rapidly into the horizon. Judging from the dusk, it was probably around six in the evening. A large, elaborate grave had taken shape before us. The military made us line up beside it. They then asked us to climb down into the grave. There was no protest or signs of resistance. I listened intently to see if there were any sounds of crying. I could only hear the roar of the sea. The jagged line was descending into the grave. I saw my brothers climb down, looking over their shoulders at me. The mosque elder who was behind me in the line started chanting in a melodic voice. It was certainly the voice for the final prayer. I listened to the voice. It seemed like it was getting louder. My feet stepped out of the line and stopped. The elder walked past me; his voice continued to chant.

A soldier walked rapidly to where I had stepped out from the line. His eyes peered sharply at mine. He was tall, with curly

hair, reminding me of my brother. As he approached me, I said:

“Let me go light the lamp for Vairavar first..”

It was clear to me that he did not understand what I said. I started walking towards the Vairavar temple. He did not stop me. I walked slowly until I reached this well. Before I could light the lamp, I needed to wash my hands and feet. Some soldiers were sitting on the wall surrounding the well. I told them:

“Please untie my hands for a while. I will light the lamp for Vairavar..”

One soldier grabbed my head, and another grabbed my feet. They lifted me off the ground and dropped me into the well. I stumbled to my feet. The water came only up to my knees. I waded over to a dark corner of the well and listened for gunshots. There was no sound of any explosion. Instead, all I heard was the giant machinery roaring back and forth. Eventually the roar approached closer. The earth started to tremble. The surrounding wall of the well was broken, and giant pieces of the wall started to fall into the well.”

Nallaināthan gently squeezed Kandewatta’s hand twice. The man draped in the white blanket resumed drinking the tea remaining in his cup.

Nallaināthan and Kandewatta deliberated the matter in hushed tones for nearly an hour. Then they went outside the tent to consult the forensic medical expert and the police officers. When they returned to the tent, they noticed that the man’s duck-egg eyes were shining brighter than before. “This man’s soul lies in his eyes,” said Kandewatta. The judges took their seats.

“Have you been able to remember your name?”

“Not yet, *aiyā*.”

“It is a wonder that you stayed alive for such a long time inside a well that was closed off.”

“It is no wonder. I survived there just like the water that stayed on the ground, or the plants, and frogs, and creepy crawlies that continue to live there.”

The judges were silent for a while and began to speak again:

“The war in this country ended seven years ago. Many thousands were killed throughout the war. Many mass graves have been discovered. There were atrocities committed by all sides. As you said yourself, human remains have been discovered without any hint as to whether they belonged to Tamils or Sinhalese or Indians. Peace has now come to our land after having had to get past all of these hurdles. This is the season for forgetting old hatreds.”

The other judge continued:

“Other countries are always pressing us to hold international investigations into these mass graves. But we have been insisting that internal investigations would suffice. We have already begun these internal investigations. It is as part of such an investigation that we excavated this well and discovered you. We completely accept the testimony you provided before us.

But of what use is your testimony for this land and its people? Your testimony is like ripping open and examining a wound that has been healing. If your testimony keeps digging

into these wounds, how will they heal? Your testimony will only fuel hatred, not peace.”

The judge concluded firmly:

“We will not permit any attempt that can hinder reconciliation. We are not prepared to lose this peace for any reason whatsoever. You said you have a social conscience and that you have always been interested in serving the people. Therefore, we assume that you are a socially responsible good citizen. Preserving peace is your duty!”

The judges stood up to signal that the judicial investigation had concluded.

The man was lowered into the well as carefully as he was lifted out earlier. The well was closed once again. Kanagasabai Thiyāgarām’s petition was dismissed by the judges.

Both judges left exhausted and with heavy hearts. When the vehicle carrying the two of them started to leave, Nallaināthan asked the vehicle to be stopped for a minute. He beckoned a police officer over to approach him, and gave him an order:

“The oil lamp for Ūripulam Vaiyavar must be lit every day without fail.”

Kandewatta took hold of Nallaināthan’s hand and squeezed it lightly.

*

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