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**LTTE Turning Its Weapons Against the Tamil
Community It Claimed to Represent Laid
the Foundation for Its Destruction:**

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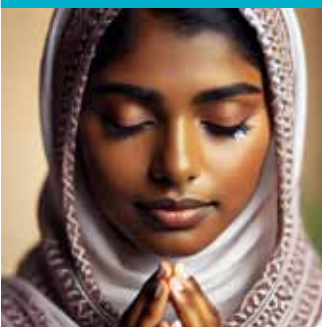
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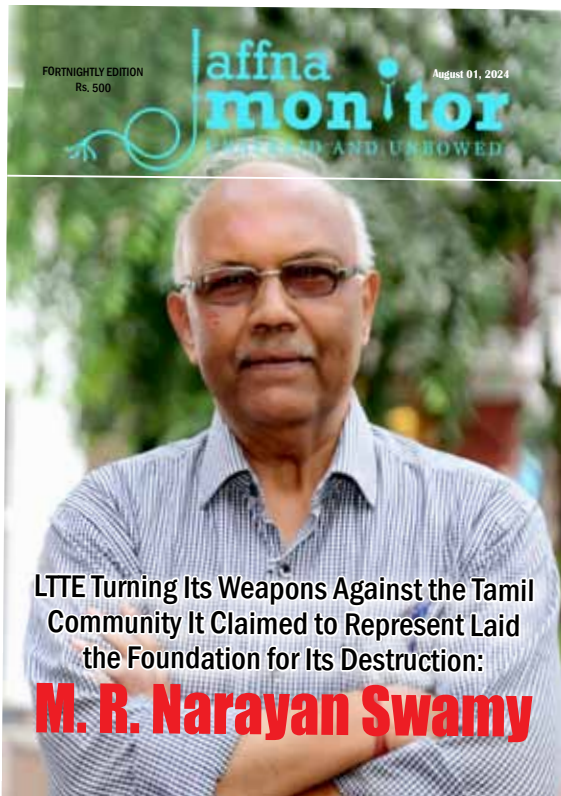
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Reflecting on 41 Years Since the 1983 Pogrom



This July 23rd marks 41 years since the 1983 ethnic pogrom, a dark chapter in Sri Lanka's history that profoundly reshaped the nation's political, economic, and social landscape. The violence, meticulously orchestrated by the then-UNP government under J.R. Jayewardene, set Sri Lanka on a path of destruction, igniting a brutal civil war that would last for decades and leave deep scars on the island's soul.

The pogrom was not a spontaneous eruption of violence but a calculated act, terrorizing an entire nation and radicalizing a generation of Tamil youth. In the wake of this carnage, many young Tamils, driven by despair and the belief that the Sinhala-majority government would kill them regardless, chose to take up arms. For them, the choice was clear: if death was inevitable, they would die fighting for dignity.

I have heard firsthand accounts of the profound impact of this violence. In one family, brothers joined different militant groups, united by a shared determination to resist a government they perceived as oppressive. This wave of radicalization catalyzed the emergence of a sophisticated and resilient Tamil resistance. The conflict that ensued wreaked havoc not only on the Tamil community but also on the Sinhala population. The LTTE's attacks on Sinhala areas, the resulting economic collapse, and the loss of countless lives derailed Sri Lanka from its potential trajectory—a nation that, given its strategic location and resources, could have been the Singapore of South Asia.

The tragedy of the 1983 pogrom extends beyond the

immediate loss of life and property. It led to a massive exodus of Tamils, creating a global diaspora whose influence is felt even today. The violence radicalized an entire generation, sowing seeds of hatred and mistrust that have yet to be fully eradicated.

It is important to make clear that this editorial is not a blanket indictment of the Sinhala people. I firmly believe that the 1983 pogrom was not an expression of the Sinhala community at large but rather the result of a meticulously planned and executed campaign by the JR government and its thugs.

A personal story from my own family illustrates this truth. My parents owe their very lives to a courageous Sinhala landlord, a man who, armed with whatever makeshift weapons he could find, stood steadfast against a mob determined to spill blood. He assured my father, "They can only reach you over my dead body." This man and his family were prepared to lay down their lives to protect my parents, embodying the true spirit of humanity and the teachings of Buddha.

However, what troubles me deeply is the silence of the majority during this pogrom. While it is true that many Sinhalese did not take part in the violence, it is equally true that the majority remained silent. Had more of these good-hearted Sinhalese come forward to stand against the mob, the outcome might have been different. Perhaps the pogrom would not have occurred, or at the very least, its effects would have been less devastating. But the silence of the majority enabled the violence to unfold unchecked.

As an editor from the minority Tamil community, my appeal is to the future. If ever again a mindless government dares to unleash violence upon a vulnerable community, I implore the silent majority to rise up and act. This is not just a Tamil issue—it is a Sri Lankan issue, one that affects us all. The 1983 pogrom and the brutal war that followed claimed countless lives on both sides, leaving a trail of devastation and loss that still haunts our nation. We cannot afford to be silent bystanders in the face of such hatred. The cost of inaction is too great, the price of silence too heavy to bear.

We must remember that our true enemy is not each other, but the insidious forces of hatred and division that seek to tear us apart. It is only through unity, courage, and a shared commitment to peace and the equitable sharing of power with Tamils that we can hope to prevent such a tragedy from ever occurring again. Let this 41st anniversary serve as a stark reminder of the devastating cost of silence and the transformative power of standing together against violence and oppression.

Warm regards,

கணியன் பூங்குன்றன்
Kaniyan Pungundran
Editor- Jaffna Monitor

LTTE Turning Its Weapons Against the Tamil Community It Claimed to Represent Laid the Foundation for Its Destruction:

M. R. Narayan Swamy



BY:

Our Special Correspondent

M. R. Narayan Swamy, the legendary journalist, needs no introduction. Born and raised in Delhi to Tamil-speaking parents, his interest—or rather his fate—with Tamil militants, particularly the LTTE, grew naturally. As an Indian, he is credited with writing some of the finest literature on the LTTE, surpassing even Sri Lankan authors.

In 1994, he published "Tigers of Lanka: From Boys to Guerrillas," a mammoth work detailing the LTTE's growth from a group of young militants to a sophisticated war machine. This book is often considered the unofficial biography of the LTTE.

In 2003, he wrote the unofficial biography of Prabhakaran, the LTTE supremo. While his first book was well-received by the upper echelons of the LTTE, his second book did not go over as well due to its critical elements.

After the LTTE's military annihilation in May 2009, he published "The Tiger Vanquished: LTTE's Story" in 2010, which is essentially a collection of articles he had written.

Fast forward to 2024, after a hiatus of almost one and a half decades, our finest writer is coming out with his latest (which he says will be his last) book, likely titled "The Rout



M. R. Narayan Swamy

of Prabhakaran." The key difference is that while his earlier works in 1994 and 2003 were written when the LTTE and its supremo were at their peak, and Prabhakaran was regarded by some as a reincarnation of the sun god, now the LTTE is done and dusted, and Prabhakaran is just a chapter in history.

We are privileged to feature an interview with M. R. Narayan Swamy in this issue as our cover story and the Jaffna Monitor is immensely honored that this is the first interview he is giving regarding his latest book, "The Rout of Prabhakaran."

How did your journey as a journalist begin, and what sparked your initial interest in Sri Lanka and the LTTE, considering your background as a Delhi-born, Delhi-settled journalist? Over the years, how did your tryst with covering the Sri Lankan conflict and the LTTE evolve?

I pursued my passion for journalism, which I had developed during my school years, in 1978 at the age of 19, soon after graduating from Delhi University. When Sri Lanka became a major news story in 1983, most of the literature produced by Tamil militant groups was in Tamil. Naturally, not every journalist in Delhi could read it. Although I was born and raised in Delhi, I studied Tamil, my mother tongue, in school, though my command of the language was not as strong as that of Tamil speakers from Tamil Nadu or Sri Lanka.

Tamil militants were happy to converse in Tamil with journalists since not everyone from their ranks was comfortable in English. 1984, I wrote to the LTTE in Madras (now Chennai) asking for their literature. I received

some booklets and a letter from Nadesan, who promised to keep sending literature. However, he never did.

My interest in Tamil militancy deepened in the mid-1980s, which is also when I first met Prabhakaran in Delhi. Over time, I met many militant leaders at various levels. My first visit to Jaffna, Sri Lanka, took place in August 1987, the day the LTTE surrendered some weapons. Since then, I have visited Sri Lanka, including the north and east, dozens of times. Through reading and repeated interactions with various actors in Sri Lanka, I learned more and more. Knowing Tamil was of immense help.

Learning is a never-ending process. I must emphasize that Sri Lanka was never my main work; it became a passion. I primarily wrote on and edited issues related to India.

Based on your extensive research and interactions, what are your opinions on the positive aspects of Prabhakaran and the LTTE you observed?

Prabhakaran and the LTTE had both positives and negatives, which are easier to observe now with time. Irrespective of how one judges Prabhakaran, I am convinced it was his personality that kept the LTTE united and fighting fit for such a long time. Due to various factors, some more evident after his death, he exuded a charisma that was appealing and motivating to his followers. He had the ability to convey that he was willing to give his everything for Tamil Eelam; everyone was expected to do the same. His refusal to compromise, while it proved negative in the long run, played a positive role in the short run. I am not delving into Prabhakaran's negatives since your question is about his positives.

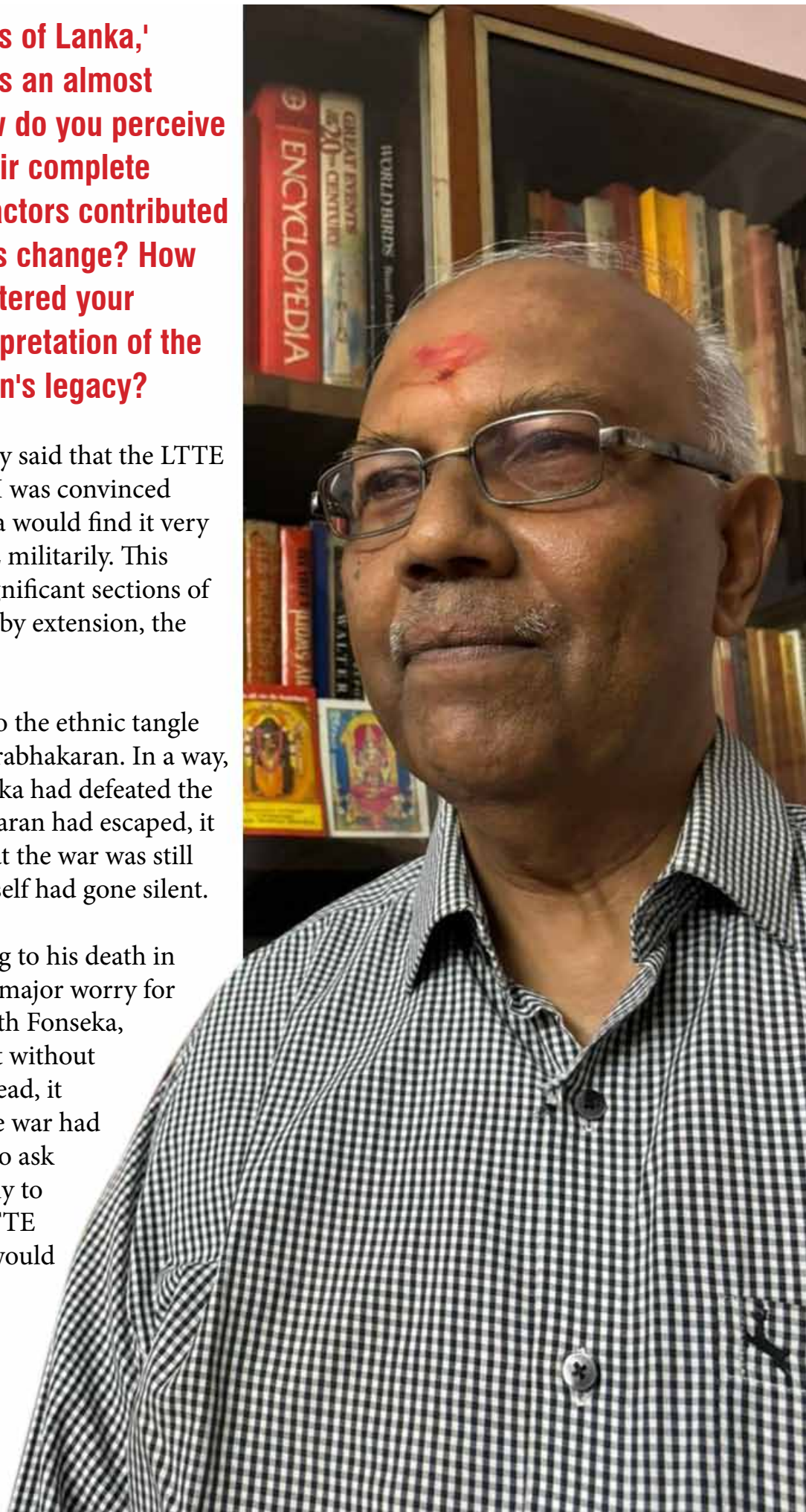
In your first book, 'Tigers of Lanka,' you depicted the LTTE as an almost undefeatable force. How do you perceive the dramatic shift to their complete eradication, and what factors contributed most significantly to this change? How has this development altered your understanding and interpretation of the conflict and Prabhakaran's legacy?

I am not sure if I ever actually said that the LTTE was undefeatable. However, I was convinced for a long time that Sri Lanka would find it very tough to overcome the LTTE militarily. This impression was shared by significant sections of the Sri Lankan military and, by extension, the establishment in Colombo.

I did write that no solution to the ethnic tangle would be possible without Prabhakaran. In a way, I was proved right. If Sri Lanka had defeated the LTTE militarily but Prabhakaran had escaped, it would be widely believed that the war was still on, even if the war theater itself had gone silent.

In the weeks and days leading to his death in May 2009, this was indeed a major worry for the Sri Lankan military. Sarath Fonseka, then army chief, insisted that without knowing Prabhakaran was dead, it could not be deemed that the war had been won. If someone were to ask me to give a single-word reply to why Prabhakaran and the LTTE were destroyed, my answer would be: Prabhakaran.

Prabhakaran's inability to grasp the larger picture, his failure to unite Tamils who disagreed with him, his lack of knowledge of geopolitics,



his nihilistic attitude, and his refusal to see the benefits of a negotiated settlement all contributed to the demise of what was once viewed as a never-say-die outfit. This forms the core of my forthcoming book.

In a way, this is also an immense tragedy because it has left the Tamil community in Sri Lanka almost on its knees post-2009. Former LTTE cadres admit this.

In the preface of your upcoming book, *The Rout of Prabhakaran*, you describe it as a 'post-mortem' of Prabhakaran, marking a significant departure from your earlier works. What motivated you to write this new book at this particular juncture?

My first book, *Tigers of Lanka*, on the origins and growth of Tamil militancy, was published in 1994. My unauthorized biography of Prabhakaran, *Inside an Elusive Mind*, followed in 2003, six years before he perished in battle. In 2010, I released my third book, *The Tiger Vanquished: LTTE's Story*, a collection of my news stories published over the decades, along with a comprehensive overview of the rise and fall of the LTTE.

Now, with 15 years having passed since Prabhakaran's death and with so much new information available and more emerging, I felt a political autopsy was needed. This new book will not be the last word on Prabhakaran, but I hope it adds to the understanding of his complex character and the Tamil struggle. If and when someone writes a fair and comprehensive biography of the Tamil struggle, I hope my books will prove useful in some ways.

How do you see the transition of Prabhakaran from a powerful figure to just a chapter in history, and what do you hope readers will take away from this post-mortem analysis?

It is a great tragedy that a man who once controlled a third of Sri Lankan territory and almost two-thirds of its winding coastline ended up in an area less than the size of a soccer field. This fact alone serves as a stark commentary on Prabhakaran and the LTTE.

The history of the LTTE is replete with immense sorrow, huge betrayals, tremendous disappointment, and vast human suffering. One may or may not admire Prabhakaran, but there are hard questions that need to be asked and answered. I have attempted to address these in my upcoming book. I am afraid my assessment will not paint a very admiring picture of the LTTE's founder leader. However unpleasant this may sound, the truth, as they say, is often bitter.

For your writings about the LTTE and Sri Lanka, including your first book, *Tigers of Lanka* (1994), and others, who among the Sri Lankans, especially Tamils, helped you?

Many Tamils in and from Sri Lanka have gone out of their way to help me when I wrote my books. I don't want to name those still



S. Sivanayagam

alive since they may or may not want it, but there is no harm in naming those who are no more. Among them, the late S. Sivanayagam stands out. He edited the Saturday Review weekly from Jaffna in the 1980s and was instrumental in my research for Tigers of Lanka. He pointed out the lack of published literature on the origins and growth of Tamil militancy in Sri Lanka.

He provided access to the entire bound volumes of Saturday Review at his Besant Nagar residence in Chennai. These volumes were a treasure trove of information, giving me a solid foundation in the events in Tamil areas during the 1970s and 1980s. He also guided me on which books to read to gain a deeper understanding of the subject.

Additionally, the late V. Balakumar, Shankar Rajee, and K. Pathmanabha provided me with valuable insights into Sri Lankan Tamil society and the LTTE. There were plenty of others, but many of them are still active in politics. I owe a lot to them and also to numerous ordinary Tamils who, in their own way, provided me with valuable nuggets that played a critical role in understanding the larger picture.

How do you respond to critics who argue that your earlier works may have romanticized the LTTE and its supremo?

Romanticized Prabhakaran and the LTTE?! I was never a fan of either, so how could I have romanticized them? In any case, Prabhakaran did so many amazing things, both positive and negative, that his actions spoke for themselves. There is no need to romanticize or demonize him.

Professionally, after more than four decades in

journalism, I am still a reporter at heart. Good journalism does not believe in romanticizing a historical figure. Let me cite one example. While writing my first book, someone who knew Prabhakaran insisted that he sharpened his skills by shooting wild monkeys between their eyes. But not one other person confirmed this, so I dropped it. If I were romanticizing the man, I would have added this, and it may have become gospel truth over time.

Do you think Prabhakaran's vision for Tamil Eelam was Realistic, or was it fundamentally flawed from the outset?

My answer is based on the present. In retrospect, man is always wise. I am sure the Tamil community had a cause to fight for when it all began, even if some of the methods were questionable. It will be nearly impossible to pinpoint when this positive factor began to go astray.

Even if one assumes that the goal was realistic at one point, it ceased to be a realistic proposition later. But it does not matter what you and I think. Prabhakaran thought it was a realistic goal, so he went on and on. The rest, as they say, is history.

The first three Eelam wars ended with significant gains for the LTTE. Where do you think they went wrong in the fourth Eelam war Despite fighting the same Sri Lankan army?

I believe I have answered part of your question earlier. Nevertheless, I can add something. You may recall one of Lenin's famous writings: "One Step Forward, Two Steps Back." All leaders must know how to forge ahead and when to step back. Both are integral parts of a



struggle. You cannot remain fixated on a single method.

In 2006, when Eelam War IV began, Prabhakaran had been fighting for 23 long years, discounting the years preceding 1983. Most of those who started off with him were either dead or had left. Looking back, how long could one go on and on? Yet Prabhakaran thought he could not only wage war again but win as well. This was a colossal miscalculation. In a way, Prabhakaran was a prisoner of his own seeming invincibility—an impression that many others also shared in Sri Lanka and beyond. The picture changed irrevocably from 2008 onwards.

Did you ever imagine that the LTTE would turn its weapons against its own people, including forcibly conscripting

young children and leading countless innocent Tamils to their tragic end at Mullivaikal in the final war? How do you explain this drastic downfall and betrayal of the Tamil cause?

The LTTE turning its weapons against the very community it claimed to represent was a significant crime that laid the foundation for its eventual destruction, even if this was not fully realized by many in the 1980s. Besides many innocent Sinhalese and Tamils, the LTTE killed innumerable Tamils—militants, moderates, and civilians—simply because they disagreed with the Tigers and Prabhakaran. In a way, the LTTE chief kept undermining himself in the long run.

I was told by credible sources that before

the LTTE was destroyed, Pottu Amman, the intelligence wing chief of the LTTE, confided to some colleagues in the final days of the last war about three major blunders he felt the LTTE had committed. One of these was the large-scale and forced conscription of children, particularly from poor families, which left the helpless parents distraught and the children deeply unhappy. But the blunders the LTTE committed were more than what Pottu Amman admitted to. The question is: who made these blundering decisions? Surely, it was Prabhakaran.

What do you believe motivated Prabhakaran to provoke the government and start the war in 2006, despite the LTTE losing its eastern commander and 6,000 cadres? How do you think Prabhakaran convinced himself to initiate the conflict when the LTTE was militarily weakened?

This is a good question, but it is not easy to answer. Some of the replies above might help. That Prabhakaran still thought he could win despite losing almost the entire eastern wing of the LTTE speaks poorly of his understanding of military affairs.

The split in the LTTE was a boon for Colombo. Balasingham, certainly more mature than Prabhakaran, warned of disaster if the LTTE went to war again. However, most people in the higher echelons of the LTTE turned out to be 'yes men' who could not or did not want to persuade their leader to think differently. The end result was a monumental disaster.

What is your assessment of the key factors that led to the LTTE's downfall?

I think I have already explained this, but I will make one point here. Despite his limitations, Anton Balasingham desired that the Tamil Eelam campaign should see a positive end in his lifetime. This is why he was livid when the LTTE killed Rajiv Gandhi. He also had a far better understanding of global affairs and what the West and Asian countries like India and Japan desired regarding Sri Lanka. None of them wanted Sri Lanka to break up. The epoch-making events of 9/11 changed much of the world's thinking about terrorism and insurgency. Prabhakaran, however, lived in a world of his own

Do you believe that Sinhala hardliners have abandoned violent tactics towards Sri Lankan Tamils, especially in light of historical events such as the burning of the Jaffna Public Library and the pogroms of 1977 and 1983? Additionally, have you observed any positive initiatives or approaches by the Sri Lankan government towards the Tamil community in recent times?

When the Sri Lankan economy crashed, leading to Gotabaya's flight and widespread shortages, many ordinary Sinhalese felt this was karmic suffering for not raising their voices against government-induced shortages of essential goods in the north and east for a long time. This feeling reflects the changes in the Sinhalese psyche. However, there is no doubt that a quarter century of bloodshed has divided Sri Lanka into 'us' and 'them,' a situation that unfortunately persists among many. The so-called Sinhalese hardliners do not want to make any meaningful concessions because they foolishly believe this will be a stepping stone to Tamil Eelam. Unless this negative thinking changes, I don't see much

hope for improving ruptured ethnic relations.

Many believe the Sri Lankan army won the war with the help of the Indian government and its tactical support. What do you think motivated the Indian government to provide this assistance?

I don't agree that Sri Lanka won the war with the help of the Indian government. With the kind of material help India was willing to provide, Sri Lanka probably could not have won the war, certainly not in 2009. The main military support for Colombo came from many countries, including Iran, Israel, Pakistan, and China. The dominant help from India and the US was in the field of intelligence, which was undoubtedly very valuable.

India also choked the sea link between Tamil Nadu and northern Sri Lanka towards the end of the war. As far as I know, the last LTTE boatload, ferrying medicines from Tamil Nadu to Prabhakaran's lair, went on May 8, 2009. Fifteen Black Tigers died in this effort, fighting the Sri Lankan Navy at sea.

Regardless of whether the Congress or the BJP ruled India, there was a consensus that Sri Lanka should not be allowed to break up. Also, remember that the most powerful person in India when the LTTE finally crashed was a woman who had been widowed by Prabhakaran in 1991 when he had Rajiv Gandhi killed.

As an Indian, how do you perceive the impact of Rajiv Gandhi's assassination on the LTTE and Sri Lankan Tamils'

relationship with the mainstream? What were the implications of this senseless attack ordered by Prabhakaran?

Among the most foolish things the LTTE and Prabhakaran committed was the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi. If there was one act of Prabhakaran that Balasingham never forgave, it was this. More than anyone else, Balasingham realized the disastrous long-term consequences of this mindless action. All his fears proved absolutely correct. After initially denying that they were anyway involved in the gory killing, Prabhakaran finally admitted the truth to Balasingham. This one action totally and irrevocably breached whatever links the LTTE may have had or could in the future have had with the Indian State and, to a great extent, with the Indian people in general.

The reality is that Prabhakaran wanted to have the cake and eat it, too. He wanted to kill Rajiv Gandhi, and he believed that no one would be able to link it up with the LTTE. I will not hesitate to say that if the world finally turned against the LTTE dream of Tamil Eelam, then the Rajiv Gandhi assassination (and some other specific killings) was a key factor. And look at destiny: the woman Prabhakaran made a widow in 1991 was the most powerful person in India when the LTTE finally went down.

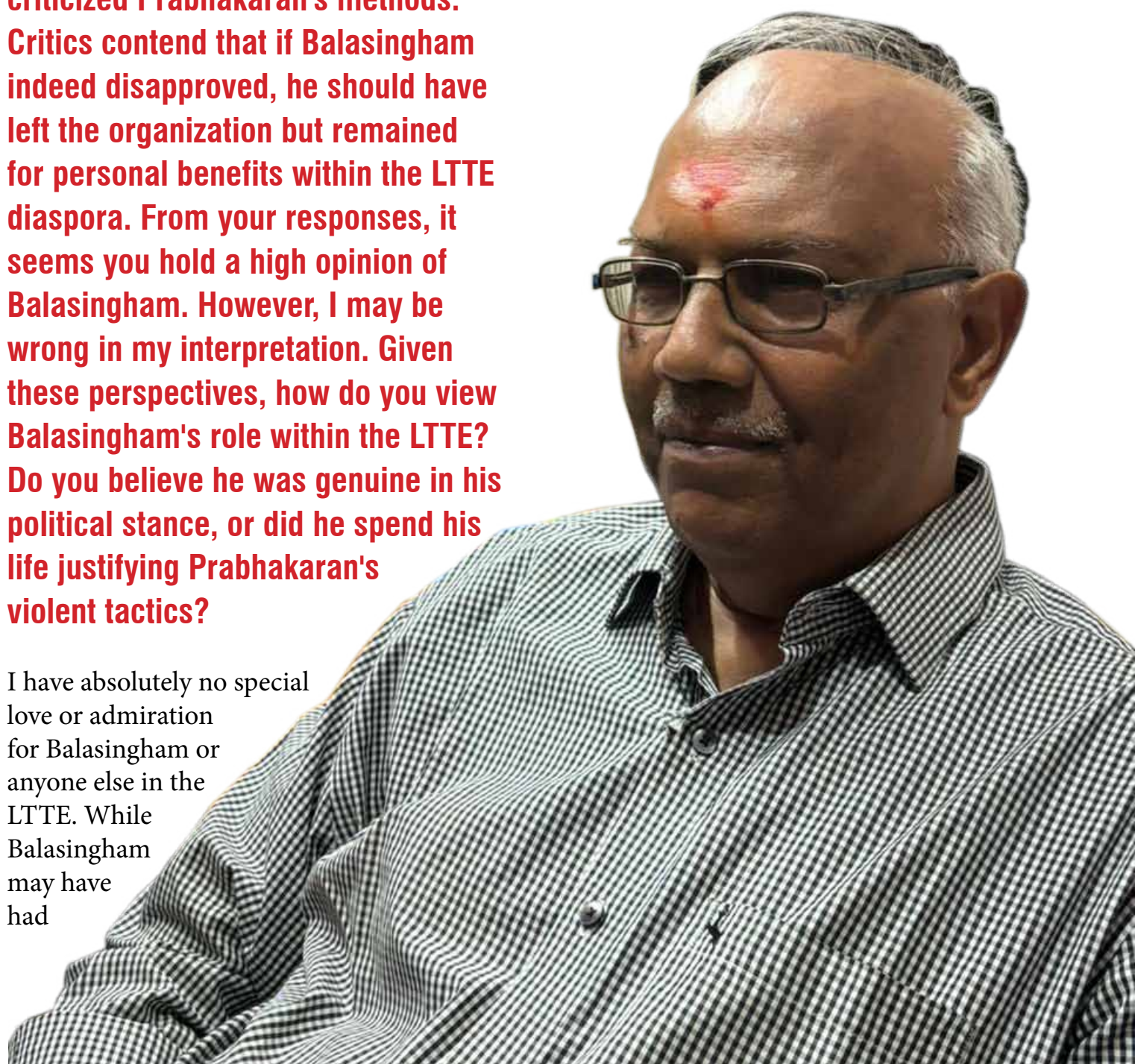
You could compare this assassination with the way Yasser Arafat went and hugged Saddam Hussein after the latter invaded and gobbled up Kuwait, losing forever the decades of invaluable financial and other support from the oil-rich Gulf countries.

There are diverse opinions regarding Anton Balasingham's role within the

LTTE. As the organization's chief theoretician, critics argue that despite his private disappointment with Prabhakaran's brutal actions-such as the assassinations of Rajiv Gandhi and Premadasa and numerous bombings-Balasingham continued to serve as the LTTE's spokesperson until his unofficial suspension. Notably, he never publicly criticized Prabhakaran's methods. Critics contend that if Balasingham indeed disapproved, he should have left the organization but remained for personal benefits within the LTTE diaspora. From your responses, it seems you hold a high opinion of Balasingham. However, I may be wrong in my interpretation. Given these perspectives, how do you view Balasingham's role within the LTTE? Do you believe he was genuine in his political stance, or did he spend his life justifying Prabhakaran's violent tactics?

I have absolutely no special love or admiration for Balasingham or anyone else in the LTTE. While Balasingham may have had

reasons for not leaving the LTTE, which can be easily speculated, he did not wait until just before his death to speak out against Prabhakaran. He had been critical of Prabhakaran to many people, including fellow Tamils and foreigners. As someone who had seen more of life and certainly understood international affairs better than Prabhakaran, he recognized the dangers of the path Prabhakaran was intent on pursuing.



All the criticism leveled against Balasingham is justified. However, this does not diminish the truth he spoke, which led to differences with Prabhakaran at a certain stage. To my knowledge, Prabhakaran was aware that Balasingham was critical of him on some if not all, issues. Incidentally, I have discussed the issue of Balasingham in some detail in my upcoming book.

Thousands of Sri Lankan Tamils still live in refugee camps in Tamil Nadu and other states, with those who arrived as refugees and those born in these camps not being granted respect, citizenship, or identification, remain stateless. This situation starkly contrasts with other countries where Sri Lankan Tamils have migrated and become influential forces. Do you think this situation is right or morally acceptable?

I do not condone the state of affairs ordinary Sri Lankan Tamils find themselves in Tamil Nadu's camps. Morally, this is a very sad situation. Most Tamils from Sri Lanka now in the camps are from the lower strata of society, which makes their condition more pitiable.

However, do note that some known pro-militants, including those who were with the LTTE, lead a normal life in Tamil Nadu and beyond. Unlike the West, which grants Tamils citizenship, I don't think India will do that.

India does not grant citizenship to the tens of thousands of Tibetans and Afghans who live in the country either.

The ethnic unrest initially began as a movement for Tamil liberation before evolving into the LTTE's struggle. Considering this historical context and acknowledging that the majority of Tamils believe the problems that drove them to take up arms remain unresolved, how do you view the current state of these issues? Additionally, what do you believe the Sri Lankan government, the What should the Indian government and Tamil politicians do to address these unresolved issues?

A post-mortem, with a positive framework of mind, is needed from everyone. The Sri Lankan State must admit that it has committed many wrongs overtime against the Tamils. The Tamil leaders should put forward concrete ideas within a united or federal set-up (the terminology is not important) outlining what should be done for a better tomorrow. This discussion should not be limited to power-sharing issues alone.

Major mistakes have been made on both sides of the ethnic divide, and there seems to be a culture of impunity on both sides. If there are said to be war criminals in the military (serving or retired), many of the LTTE fighters who surrendered and are alive can also be classified similarly. Colombo never apologized for the thousands of deaths of innocents during the JVP insurgencies, so it may be too much to expect them to do so regarding the Tamils.

India can and must assist in this process but without being interventionist.

Can the LTTE ever re-emerge?

It cannot. The LTTE is dead and gone. The LTTE is not an electrical equipment that can be switched on or off at will. The LTTE and other groups emerged within a specific geopolitical framework at a certain historical juncture. There was a Prabhakaran (excluding other militant leaders for now) who provided shape and leadership to the group. The Tamil cause also enjoyed moral legitimacy in 1983. All of this no longer exists.

Prabhakaran is revered by many of his supporters and refuted by others. Considering both perspectives, what is your comprehensive assessment of his legacy and impact?

There could have been no LTTE without Prabhakaran. However, as I say, while he undoubtedly had leadership skills, he lacked some other qualities vital to lead a movement to a logical conclusion. It is good to revere a leader, even to glorify one, but a brazen refusal to accept criticism can never help. Mahatma Gandhi is India's Father of the Nation but is subject to many critical analyses in his country.

If you need to know the bottom line of Prabhakaran's legacy, you must talk to former LTTE guerrillas in confidence. One ex-woman fighter told me that the Tamils stood on their legs in 1983; a bloody quarter century later, they stare at an uncertain future. Is this why this war went on for so long and why so many thousands, combatants and non-combatants, perished?

Although the LTTE has been dismantled, the ideologies of the LTTE

and its leader, Prabhakaran, which we can term "Prabhakaranism," still persist among the Sri Lankan Tamils...

This is a natural phenomenon. Mahatma Gandhi is no more, but Gandhism as an idea exists. But it does not have the same potency. One reason "Prabhakaranism," as you describe it, still exists is because a significant section of the society, either out of loyalty or fear or both, strongly believed in it, thinking for a long time that it would yield positive results. It turned out to be the opposite. It will be difficult for people who believed in the idea of Prabhakaran and Tamil Eelam to shun it overnight. But many have. Over time, the idea will lose potency. As more and more truth of whatever happened in the Tiger land over the years and decades comes out, more and more people will drift away. The hardcore supporters will remain, more outside of Sri Lanka and less within the island nation.

What is your perspective on the role of the Tamil diaspora in the LTTE's operations and their ongoing influence in Tamil politics today?

The diaspora was the creation of the 1983 pogrom and the subsequent Tamil insurgency. One Sri Lankan Tamil nationalist who was with Prabhakaran almost until the latter's end told me that the birth of a huge diaspora was perhaps the biggest gain of what is called the Sri Lankan problem.

It is a pity that dominant sections of the Tamil diaspora lived in the West and enjoyed its democratic space and opportunities but did not raise their voices against even the visible flaws of the LTTE and its excesses. It is possible they did not want to or could not afford the risk. Either way, the diaspora indirectly and

unwittingly contributed, although they may not have wanted it. Of course, there were others who spoke against the LTTE and paid a price for their courage.

In hindsight, what could the Sri Lankan government have done differently to prevent the rise of the LTTE?

This is now an academic question. Sri Lanka had many opportunities to come to an understanding with moderate Tamil leaders in a bygone era, with some give and take. Looking back, some Sinhalese leaders were too narrow-minded.

They could have learned from the way different governments in India dealt at different times with what can be called the nationality question. India is not a perfect example, but it is not a bad example either.

What tips and guidance would you offer to young writers and Journalists in Sri Lanka who aspire to cover complex and sensitive Topics, much like you have done throughout your career?

As I said in the beginning, Sri Lanka was a passion and not my bread and butter. I have covered a variety of national and international issues, including the civil war in Nicaragua, the PLO National Council meeting in Jordan, the assassinations of Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi, the Bhopal gas disaster (at that time the world's worst industrial disaster), international events in India and abroad, the Indian prime ministers' visits abroad (among the toughest assignments), as well as numerous elections, political upheavals, communal strife, disasters, and more in India. I have met

Yasser Arafat, the Dalai Lama, and US-based Khalistani leaders, besides top Indian political leaders. I have written widely on diplomatic issues.

I come from a simple middle-class family and don't have great academic credentials. I read constantly to keep myself up to date on various issues. My advice to young journalists is to keep working hard and seize every professional opportunity that comes your way with both hands. Do not be biased for or against anyone professionally; be humble and have empathy for the less privileged. A reporter should take pride in doing even the smallest of stories.

Anyone can commit an error (I have made my share of mistakes), but try your best to check and cross-check matters of importance. Also, learn as many languages as you can. Reading and exposure to other cultures will broaden your worldview.

Don't chase money. My monthly stipend when I took to journalism in 1978 was 400 rupees. I survived because I lived with my parents. After eight years of slogging in UNI, my salary was a paltry 2,600 rupees. While in Bhopal for 16 days covering the gas disaster, our daily allowance was so meager that I could only afford lunch for 7 rupees, while most journalists from Delhi stayed in good hotels. We went daily to Hindu cremation grounds and Muslim burial sites to count the rising number of dead (as the government was not giving out figures) on cycle rickshaws. I saw money and comfort only after joining the AFP.

More than anything else, to succeed in life, you need the blessings of your parents, guru, and divinity. Pride and arrogance will cancel this out.



Sri Lanka's Women Make History with First T20 Asia Cup Triumph

In a sensational showdown at the Rangiri Dambulla Stadium, Sri Lanka's women's cricket team etched their names in history by securing their inaugural Women's T20 Asia Cup, triumphing over India by eight wickets in a riveting finale destined to be remembered for years. This victory, achieved with eight balls to spare, represents a monumental milestone in Sri Lankan cricket and establishes a new standard for the nation's women athletes.

Sri Lanka had previously reached the Asia

Cup finals in five of the tournament's eight editions yet consistently fell short, losing all five finals to India. However, this time marked a departure from the past. Demonstrating an exceptional brand of cricket, the Sri Lankan women's team overcame a formidable Indian side, setting a new record for the highest successful chase in T20 Internationals for the team.

Set a target of 166, it initially looked like India's game. Sri Lanka had never chased such



a high total in T20 Internationals, let alone in a final. But the Sri Lankan women believed in themselves and completed a comprehensive win. The victory was orchestrated by captain Chamari Athapaththu's explosive 61 and Harshitha Samarawickrama's unbeaten 69. Kavisha Dilhari's all-round performance, including a crucial 30 not out off 16 balls.

India's formidable total of 165 for 6, led by Smriti Mandhana's 60, seemed daunting. Yet, Chamari Athapaththu's aggressive batting against India's left-arm spinners turned the tide. Her onslaught in the powerplay, which included two sixes and two fours off Tanuja Kanwar, set the tone for the chase. When Chamari was bowled by Deepti Sharma for 61, it seemed like Sri Lanka might falter, as she had been the team's main match-winner for over a decade. But number three batter Harshitha Samarawickrama kept fighting. An unbroken 73-run partnership for the third wicket followed between Harshitha and Dilhari, as Sri Lanka pulled off a sensational win.

Harshitha Samarawickrama's composed innings proved pivotal after Chamari Athapaththu's departure. She capitalized on India's misfields and dropped catches, including a crucial one by Harmanpreet Kaur when she was on 45. Harshitha Samarawickrama was unbeaten on 69 off 51 balls with six fours and two sixes. Kavisha Dilhari finished 30 not out, having faced 16 balls with one four and two sixes. Dilhari's powerful hitting in the final overs ensured a comfortable win for Sri Lanka, sharing an unbeaten 73-run stand with Samarawickrama.

This win is expected to be a significant boost for women's cricket in Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka Cricket announced a winning bonus of US\$ 100,000 for the team. Better match fees and endorsements from sponsors are likely to follow. More than anything, the win is sure to inspire more girls to take up the game. A full house witnessed the final, and many young girls would aspire to follow in the footsteps of Chamari Athapaththu or Harshitha Samarawickrama.



The victory is a testament to coach Rumesh Ratnayake's transformative impact since his appointment in early 2023. Under his guidance, Sri Lanka has seen significant improvements in performance and morale. His emphasis on a positive, cohesive environment and focus on "one ball at a time" has paid dividends, with Sri Lanka achieving notable victories in both T20Is and ODIs. Last year, the team won series in England and South Africa, apart from beating New Zealand at home.



Chamari Athapaththu's journey to this historic moment has been marked by perseverance and leadership. Holding the Asia Cup trophy amidst adoring fans, she symbolized the new era of Sri Lankan women's cricket. "That's over, now focus on the next thing," she said, embodying the team's forward-looking mentality.

As Sri Lanka revels in this monumental achievement, all eyes are on the future. With the T20 World Cup on the horizon in October, the team, invigorated by their historic victory, is determined to maintain their winning momentum. This triumph signifies a new era for Sri Lankan women's cricket, inspiring future generations to take up the sport. The roaring crowd at the packed Rangiri Dambulla Stadium, united in celebration, showcased the burgeoning support and recognition for women's cricket in the nation.



Thambapillai Maheswaran

Thambapillai Maheswaran: A Complex Legacy in the Tamil Eelam Struggle



BY:

Kaniyan Pungundran

கணியன் பூங்குன்றன்

Thambapillai Maheswaran, a prominent early figure in the Sri Lankan Tamil struggle and leader of the Tamil militant group Tamil Eelam Army (TEA), has passed away due to a heart attack in Jaffna. Maheswaran was renowned for his daredevil attacks during the early days of the Eelam liberation struggle, which preceded and, to some degree, inspired a few daring operations carried out by the LTTE. His actions were pivotal in shaping the early course of the Tamil militants' fight against the chauvinistic Sinhala government.

Maheswaran hails from an affluent family in Pungudutivu. His father, Thambippillai, was a prosperous businessman who, like many residents of Pungudutivu, ventured into the restaurant business. He owned the renowned Dhawalagiri Hotel in Colombo's Maradana and was a highly successful entrepreneur who sold his hotel for reasons best known to him before the 1980s.

Interestingly, despite his father's name being Thambippillai, it was often mispronounced as Thambapillai. This led to Maheswaran being commonly known as Thambapillai Maheswaran. In an ironic twist, Maheswaran's militant group was initially called the Thampa Group, a mispronunciation of his father's name.

Maheswaran's siblings are thriving and live comfortably in Western countries. His sister is a doctor, one of his brothers is a retired accountant, his younger brother is settled in the USA, and his elder sister resides in the UK. Their family's financial success, primarily from the hotel business, enabled them to send Maheswaran to the prestigious Queen's College, London University, in the mid-1970s. During his time in London, he lived with his elder sister, who was married to a well-established accountant. Sources close to Maheswaran revealed that he initially studied civil engineering before switching to aeronautical engineering.

While in London, Maheswaran befriended Anton Balasingam and Ratnasabapathy, a founding member of the Eelam Revolutionary Organization of Students (EROS). At that time, Anton Balasingam, who would later become the LTTE's theoretician, had not yet formed connections with the LTTE or its leader, Prabhakaran. During Maheswaran's funeral

service, the People's Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE) leader Dharmalingam Siddharthan stated that Anton Balasingham was influenced to join the LTTE by Maheswaran. Siddharthan mentioned that Maheswaran was instrumental in introducing Anton Balasingham to the LTTE.

Sources close to Maheswaran told the Jaffna Monitor that he had his first sips of alcohol in London with Anton Balasingam, a habit that later became a detrimental element in his life.

Some sources suggest that Maheswaran was genuinely driven by a fervent desire for Tamil liberation. They depict him as a man deeply committed to the Tamil cause, motivated by a passionate resolve to free his people from oppression and bring about social justice.

However, another set of sources offers a contrasting view. They argue that Maheswaran was primarily impulsive, more captivated by the thrill of executing audacious attacks on the Sinhala army and the Sri Lankan government than by any profound understanding of ethnic liberation. This perspective likens him to his counterpart, LTTE supremo Prabhakaran, who is also seen as having a penchant for bold, high-stakes operations rather than the nuanced political strategy that would help achieve ultimate ethnic liberation.

True to his impulsive style, which later became evident in his numerous attacks, Maheswaran discontinued his studies and returned to Sri Lanka in 1980 after taking his sister's jewelry to fuel his efforts. A close friend of Maheswaran informed the Jaffna Monitor that his elder sister often lamented his decision to abandon his valuable education and return to Sri Lanka with her jewels. In response, Maheswaran said, as his close friend revealed, "With your jewelry, I did not do anything for

myself. I just purchased two revolvers."

Despite this disappointment, sources say that Maheswaran maintained a very good relationship with his family until his death. Maheswaran, who remained unmarried throughout his life, was financially supported by his siblings in his later years.

Friends who studied with Maheswaran at Jaffna Central College informed the Jaffna Monitor that he was a brilliant student with a sharp memory and excelled in sports. He played cricket and football for Central College and participated in a few matches representing his school. This combination of academic brilliance and athletic talent made Maheswaran a notable figure during his school years.

'Panagoda' Maheswaran

Maheswaran cemented his legendary status in the 1980s with a daring escape from Panagoda Military Camp, a high-security detention center. Ingeniously, he cut through the iron window bars of his cell, concealed the cuts with chewing gum, and made his escape in early 1983. This audacious act celebrated as the first jailbreak in Sri Lankan history, earned him the nickname "Panagoda Maheswaran" and garnered immense respect and admiration among Tamil youths.

However, his bold escape was short-lived; he was arrested the very next day following a tip-off from a Muslim household in Peliyagoda. This episode not only showcased his remarkable ability to execute daring actions but also highlighted the gaps in his planning and strategy.

A close friend of Maheswaran told the Jaffna Monitor that, after a few drinks, he often

confronted him, even recently, asking, "You were just an impulsive youth without any proper ideology or plan for the liberation of an ethnicity. If you had one, things might have been different." The friend elaborated on his argument, explaining, "Your family sent you to London to study at a prestigious university. Instead of completing your studies, you ran back to Sri Lanka. If your true motive was to liberate our people, you would have stayed in London and supported a militant movement from there or joined an existing militant group. Instead, you returned to Sri Lanka and started a new militant group, revealing your bourgeois mentality." According to this source, Maheswaran felt uncomfortable with the confrontation and could not provide a proper response.

Narrow Escapes and Daring Plans: The Welikada and Batticaloa Prison Breaks

Maheswaran was one of the few who narrowly escaped the brutal violence that erupted inside Welikada Prison during the July riots. Amid the state-sponsored attacks on Tamil political prisoners by Sinhala mobs, Maheswaran, along with Douglas Devananda, an early militant who is now the EPDP general secretary and a cabinet minister, used makeshift weapons fashioned from twisted bedsheets and other items to block the cell doors and fend off the bloodthirsty attackers. Devananda often credited Maheswaran's quick thinking and sharp mind with saving his life during that harrowing time.

Following this incident, Maheswaran and other survivors of the state-sponsored jail pogrom were transferred to Batticaloa Prison. It was here that Maheswaran and his fellow inmates orchestrated one of the most daring escapes in Sri Lankan history: the infamous Batticaloa jailbreak on September 23, 1983, exactly two

months after the riots. While inside the prison, Maheswaran meticulously planned the escape, including the escape route and vehicles, with the help of his local fighters outside.

Funding the Fight: Maheswaran's Audacious Bank Heists

During a period when Tamil Eelam liberation movements financed their activities through bank robberies, Maheswaran's Tamil Eelam Army (TEA) successfully executed several heists, with the most famous one occurring at the People's Bank in Kathankudy, Batticaloa, in 1984. In this audacious raid, the TEA seized cash and jewelry worth approximately 30 million rupees—a massive sum at the time. During the heist, the TEA also captured a high-end 250 cc white police motorcycle. According to sources, this motorcycle was later transported to Chennai by sea and subsequently found in an LTTE camp in Tamil Nadu. Readers will soon understand how the TEA-seized bike ended up in the LTTE camp in Tamil Nadu.

The Kilinochchi Attack: A Blueprint for Future Operations

On September 23, 1985, Maheswaran planned a vehicle-borne explosive attack on the Kilinochchi police and army joint camp, a tactic that would later become a hallmark of the LTTE. As an explosives specialist, Maheswaran and his team rigged a lorry with explosives and staged a petrol tanker nearby. They sent both vehicles near the Kilinochchi army camp simultaneously, planning that when the explosive-laden lorry detonated, the resulting fire would ignite the petrol tanker, creating a massive



explosion. The lorry exploded at midnight, causing significant damage to the police station and surrounding areas, although the petrol tanker failed to detonate.

The Tamil Eelam Army claimed responsibility, with Maheswaran directly overseeing the operation. Using his technical knowledge gained in London, Maheswaran executed one of the earliest vehicle-borne explosive attacks. This method was later adopted by the LTTE and famously used in the attack on Nelliady by Captain Miller (Vallipuram Vasanthan) on July 5, 1987, on the Sri Lanka Army base at Nelliady Madhya Maha Vidyalayam. Credible sources within the LTTE told the Jaffna Monitor that the LTTE, inspired by Maheswaran's Kilinochchi attack, planned the Nelliady attack with a simple logic: what would have been the effect if they had sent a fighter (suicide bomber) in the lorry. This led to the brutal legacy of the LTTE Black Tigers, the notorious suicide squad.

Doubts About India's Intentions

Sources close to Maheswaran in his early militant days conveyed to the Jaffna Monitor that he always harbored doubts about the true intentions of India's intervention in the Sri Lankan Tamil problem. Maheswaran often stressed the need for a base outside India, saying, "We can't completely trust India." He attempted to establish a base on an island in the Maldives, but that failed. He also tried to set up operations in an African country, but this too was unsuccessful.

Despite these setbacks, Maheswaran pioneered the procurement of arms from foreign countries, although the weapons he obtained were less sophisticated than those the LTTE would later acquire. In this regard, he was ahead of his time, paving the way for future arms procurement efforts.

Meenambakkam Bomb Blast

All hell broke loose when Maheswaran masterminded the Meenambakkam bomb blast on August 2, 1984, at Meenambakkam International Airport, now known as Chennai International Airport. Maheswaran intended to cripple the Sri Lankan economy by targeting Katunayake Airport. He placed bombs in two suitcases loaded onto an airplane bound for Sri Lanka, intending the blast to strike an airport in Colombo. The timer was set for detonation at 10:52 p.m., just as Air Lanka flight UL-122 was scheduled to reach Colombo International Airport. The aircraft was to leave Madras (Chennai), India, at 8:10 p.m. that evening. The Maheswaran's plan was to explode the bomb after the luggage was removed from the plane in Sri Lanka and dispatched to the cargo complex. The intensity of the blast was set so high that it would have destroyed at least six planes at the airport.



Maheswaran purchased a ticket for the Air Lanka flight but never boarded the plane. He attempted to transmit the luggage to the intended Air Lanka flight, but the suitcases were mistakenly included in baggage for a flight to London. When Maheswaran was identified as the only passenger not to board the aircraft, customs authorities detained the luggage. The Air Lanka flight took off around 8:15 p.m. without the bombs on board. Maheswaran monitored the entire incident from within the airport and made repeated calls warning the airport authorities about the bombs in the confiscated luggage.

Though the police eventually tried to retrieve the luggage, a customs inspector objected to handing over the baggage, believing it contained contraband, most likely gold bars, which he may have thought to pocket for himself. Maheswaran made two more anonymous calls warning that the luggage contained explosives that would detonate around 11:00 p.m., but only after the third call

did the customs inspector concede to hand over the suitcases.

By then, it was too late. The blast occurred at 10:52 p.m. when a baggage handler attempted to move the luggage to a more secure location. The explosion rocked the international arrival hall, killing over 31 people, including 23 Sri Lankan nationals, among them a few Sri Lankan Tamils and a woman from Kilinochchi. Another 38 people were injured. The blast was so powerful that one victim's head was severed and flung 150 feet away. The explosion brought the concrete ceiling of the arrival hall down, dismembering several passengers from Colombo who were waiting for an early morning flight to Abu Dhabi. The concrete roof of the Customs baggage inspection hall crumbled, and debris and splinters of glass panes were strewn all over the arrival hall and the adjoining tarmac.

Maheswaran and ten others were arrested, but he later jumped bail. He was eventually rearrested and remained in jail until his release in 2010.

Uncovering the Truth Behind the Bombing

When the Meenambakkam bomb blast occurred, the blame naturally fell on the LTTE, as it was the most active and well-known militant group operating in Tamil Nadu at the time. The majority of Tamil newspapers and the general public in Tamil Nadu referred to all militant groups and fighters as "Tigers," leading to widespread belief that the LTTE was responsible for the heinous attack. Consequently, LTTE supremo Prabhakaran ordered his fighters to uncover the true perpetrators of the bombing with concrete evidence.

Karuna Amman, who would later become the LTTE's military chief for the Batticaloa-Ampara district, took on the task. Despite Maheswaran being from northern Jaffna, the majority of his Tamil Eelam Army (TEA) fighters hailed from Batticaloa. Utilizing his local Batticaloa connections, Karuna discovered that the TEA was behind the bombing. Credible sources within the LTTE told the Jaffna Monitor that this crucial information was conveyed to the Indian and Tamil Nadu authorities by the Tigers, who later announced their findings as their own.

The Aftermath of the Meenambakkam Bomb Blast

Following the Meenambakkam bomb blast that led TEA leader Maheswaran to go underground and the LTTE's ban on all other militant organizations, including the TEA, many TEA members either joined the LTTE or left the movement. It was said that Maheswaran instructed his fighters to avoid confrontations with the LTTE, surrender their arms, and leave peacefully. Consequently, prominent TEA members such as Thampirasa, Siththa, 'Appuchi' Varathan, and around 25-30 others joined the LTTE and were trained at the LTTE's 10th training camp in Kolathur.

Siththa, now living peacefully in a European country, was hailed as a daring fighter by the LTTE. 'Appuchi' Varathan became a trusted lieutenant to Pottu Amman and masterminded the Joint Operations Command (JOC) bombing on Flower Road. He later consumed cyanide and died at the house of Up-Country People's Front leader Periyasamy Chandrasekaran.

A former prominent LTTE member who interacted closely with ex-TEA guards told the Jaffna Monitor that although he never met Maheswaran, he always believed Maheswaran



Aftermath of the Meenambakkam Bomb Blast, August 2, 1984

must have been a formidable fighter and an inspiring leader, judging by the dedication and performance of the TEA fighters who joined the LTTE.

The Heavy Conscience of Maheswaran

Close friends of Maheswaran revealed to the Jaffna Monitor that in his later life, Maheswaran became a prisoner of his conscience. He deeply regretted many of his actions, particularly the Meenambakkam bomb blast. In addition to this well-known incident, he felt profound remorse for a lesser-known incident involving the execution of three goldsmiths.

While the Meenambakkam bomb blast was widely known, the story of the three goldsmiths remained largely unknown. Maheswaran's daring bank robbery in Kathankudy resulted in his team escaping with 3 crores worth of money and a substantial amount of gold. His Tamil Eelam Army (TEA) later entrusted part of this gold to

three goldsmiths in Nelliady, Vadamarachi, to be melted down. When the goldsmiths cheated him by keeping a few grams of gold during the process, an enraged Maheswaran summoned them to a hideout and ordered their execution. Additionally, he ordered a few other executions in Batticaloa and Jaffna in the name of destroying traitors.

Sources close to Maheswaran mentioned that he often felt a deep sense of guilt over these killings. He would reflect on the lives lost by his command and the brutal decisions he had made. As the years passed, the daring militant who once inspired fear and admiration became a man tormented by his past, haunted by the shadows of his own actions.

What happened to the large sum of 3 crores stolen in the Kathankudy bank robbery by the TEA remains a subject of intrigue. While part of it was used for arms procurement and other activities, sources say that a large portion of the money was swindled by TEA members. In one incident, it was an open secret that one of

Maheswaran's deputies was building a house in Jaffna with the help of that money.

Maheswaran's Leadership Style

Within the TEA, sources say Maheswaran was commonly called "Thamba." He wasn't referred to as a leader, commander, or comrade; the fighters in his organization habitually called him 'Annaachi.' "Annaachi" is a term used in Batticaloa to express elder brotherly affection.

Even though Maheswaran's TEA operated primarily in Sinhala border villages in Batticaloa, Ampara, and Polonnaruwa, and in Muslim villages, they did not engage in violence against the local people. His organization maintained a relationship of mutual understanding with Sinhala and Muslim communities, as well as with other militant organizations.

When the LTTE banned other militant organizations, Maheswaran did not openly oppose the ban. A former TEA fighter reasoned that understanding one's strengths and weaknesses and saving the fighters was a leader's responsibility, and that is what Maheswaran did by not opposing the LTTE. This does not mean he accepted the LTTE's ban; interpreting it that way would be a misunderstanding, he said.

Later Life and Death

After the Meenambakkam bomb blast, Maheswaran was imprisoned in India for 12 years. Following his release, he went to Tanzania, reportedly to reunite with his family members who were in Western countries. However, this reunion did not happen easily. Maheswaran violated visa regulations and was jailed again in Tanzania for breaking visa rules. After being freed, he returned to

Sri Lanka, a passage facilitated by Minister Douglas Devananda, who was also a friend of Maheswaran and a former jail mate in Panagoda Army Camp and Welikada Prison.

Maheswaran's death surprisingly attracted condolences from all quarters, including die-hard LTTE supporters. The Transnational Government of Tamil Eelam (TGTE)'s so-called Prime Minister, Visvanathan Rudrakumaran, in a press release, stated that the loss of Thambapillai Maheswaran, a great man who firmly stood on the path of the Tamil Eelam liberation struggle, has plunged them into immense grief.

Ironically, sources close to Maheswaran revealed that he always vehemently opposed the TGTE, often expressing his disdain for the organization. In his view, it was as if he wanted to "bite them and eat them." Moreover, the Tamil National People's Front (TNPF), known for its self-proclaimed authority in labeling traitors and patriots, added to the irony. The TNPF's troublemakers, including Member of Parliament Kajendran and media spokesperson Sugash Kanagaratnam, bestowed upon Maheswaran the title of patriot. Another Tamil nationalist politician, Sivagnanam Shritharan, expressed his condolences in parliament.

It's well known that in his later life, Maheswaran aligned himself with the EPDP and maintained a close friendship with its leader, Minister Douglas Devananda, a former jail mate from Welikada and Panagoda Army Camp. After being released from an Indian prison in 2010, Maheswaran attempted to move to Tanzania to join his siblings. However, due to visa restrictions, he was jailed in Tanzania as well. Later, he contacted Douglas Devananda, who facilitated his return to Sri Lanka. Devananda personally cleared him at the airport, took him to his house in Colombo,



Thambapillai Maheswaran (far left) with Cabinet Minister and Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP) Leader Douglas Devananda, along with EPDP functionaries, at a Party Press Conference

and provided him with refuge.

Although Maheswaran was not an active EPDP member, he fully aligned himself with the EPDP later in life. This may be the first time in history that a person closely associated with the EPDP received condolences from LTTE proxies, adding a layer of unexpected irony to the tributes following his death.

A few years before his death, at an EPDP party meeting, Maheswaran reportedly said in anger, "The foolish actions of Prabhakaran have led to the failure of this struggle." The irony now lies in the same people who once regarded Prabhakaran as a god, offering their condolences and even proclaiming Maheswaran as a patriot and pillar of Tamil Eelam.

Irony in Admiration

A close friend of Maheswaran offered an intriguing perspective on why LTTE sympathizers are now hailing Maheswaran, a leader of a different militant group they always considered traitorous. In the LTTE's lexicon, any group other than their own was deemed

a traitor. He reasoned that Maheswaran's lack of confrontation with the LTTE when it banned his Tamil Eelam Army (TEA) played a significant role. Instead of opposing the LTTE, Maheswaran ordered his guards to comply, which likely spared him from being targeted by Prabhakaran. Additionally, Maheswaran spent a significant portion of his prime years in jail, which meant he wasn't actively functioning as a militant leader. Had he been free, he would have undoubtedly been on Prabhakaran's hit list, the friend said.

The friend further elaborated, saying that Maheswaran, in many ways, was a precursor to or similar to Prabhakaran. He was daring, ruthless, and more focused on executing shocking attacks than on developing a comprehensive ethnic liberation strategy. Both Prabhakaran and Maheswaran had little regard for human lives. He quipped that if Maheswaran had been in Prabhakaran's place, he would have likely transformed the LTTE into an equally formidable war machine. However, with the same relentless drive and disregard for human life, Maheswaran would have ultimately steered it toward the same tragic fate at Mullivaikal.

United in Deception: The Hilarious Saga of Tamil Political Theatrics



BY:
David Ignatius

Some political parties and civil society organizations are rallying behind the idea of a 'Common Tamil Candidate' for the presidential election, and it's bound to be a comedy of errors. But here's the kicker: insider information reveals that their real master plan isn't about the presidential election. They know, with every fiber of their being, that as minorities, they

can't make a dent in the presidential election any more than a mouse can shake an elephant. Instead, it's a crafty scheme designed to deceitfully capture votes for the subsequent parliamentary elections. It's like an elaborate magic trick where the real illusion is revealed in the second act!

With the pomp and circumstance of an international treaty, a memorandum of understanding was recently signed by the Tamil National Assembly to field a 'Common Tamil Candidate' for the presidential election. This grandiose agreement involves five parties from the Democratic Tamil National Alliance: the People's Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE), the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organization (TELO), the Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF), the Tamil National Party, and the Democratic Fighters Party. Adding to the spectacle, it includes the ever-troublesome "Tamil's sorrow," C.V. Wigneswaran's Tamil People's Alliance, P. Ainkaranesan's Tamil National Green Movement, and the Tamil People's General Assembly, representing a smorgasbord of Tamil civil organizations.

This coalition of Tamil parties and civil society organizations, now known as the 'Tamil National Assembly,' is a veritable circus of opportunistic individuals and organizations. While they rally behind the notion of a common Tamil candidate, it's hard not to see the humor in their theatrics. The idea of uniting such a diverse and self-serving group under one banner seems almost as fantastical as the notion of their candidate making a significant impact in the presidential election.

"Understanding that this coalition of Tamil parties and civil society organizations is not focused on public welfare is not rocket

science," a known source said. "Their alliance for the presidential election, promising a 'Common Tamil Candidate,' is more of a comedic strategy to capture votes for the upcoming parliamentary elections. They know they can't make a splash in the presidential election—it's like expecting a mouse to move a mountain. Instead, their main goal is to gain influence in the parliamentary elections that follow the presidential one. It's all smoke and mirrors, designed to pull the wool over everyone's eyes and secure their positions in the next act of this political theatre.

The presidential election has been scheduled for September 21. President Ranil Wickremasinghe has announced his candidacy as an independent candidate. Meanwhile, Sajith Premadasa, Anura Kumara Dissanayake, Sarath Fonseka, and Wijeyadasa Rajapakshe have also declared their intention to run in the election. Notably, Wijeyadasa Rajapakshe has resigned as Minister of Justice to contest the election.

In contrast, Tamil political parties and civil society organizations are still embroiled in deliberations over who to field as the common Tamil candidate. This situation borders on the farcical. Numerous complications and disagreements are inevitable. Will they field a candidate from the North or the East? If from the North, which specific area – Mannar, Jaffna, Kilinochchi, Vavuniya, or Mullaitivu? Each region has its own local leaders and political dynamics, making consensus difficult.

Furthermore, according to the constitution, anyone contesting the presidential election must be a former member of parliament. This means that the so-called civil society leaders cannot contest independently. A civil society leader who wants to run for President must do

so under a party's banner. This adds another layer of complexity: will they find an MP to contest, and if so, who will it be?

The question remains whether they will choose a candidate from their ranks or seek out a former member of Parliament who can represent their interests. Identifying a suitable candidate who can command broad support across different regions and factions is a daunting task. The lack of unity and the presence of numerous factions and interests within the Tamil political and civil landscape make it highly improbable that they will reach an agreement.

Considering that the Sri Lankan Tamil population constitutes less than 11% of the total population, you can't help but wonder: what's the point of fielding a common Tamil candidate? Even if every Tamil person voted for this candidate, what difference would it make? Instead of uniting, they're more likely to end up misleading both themselves and the people, continuing their usual pattern of political theatrics. It's like watching a comedy show where the performers think they're starring in a serious drama, but the audience knows it's all just a farce.

Moreover, Tamil MPs who support a common Tamil candidate, such as Dharmalingam Sithadthan and Selvam Adaikalanathan, have received substantial special development funds from the President. Consequently, they cannot openly act against him. These MPs must either support Ranil in the presidential election or remain silent. In their close circles, they have admitted that the concept of a common Tamil candidate is a mere facade. Numerous witnesses have confirmed that they have pledged their support to Ranil in private meetings. They have assured Ranil that they

will secretly work for him while pretending to support the common Tamil candidate.

In reality, the parties supporting the common Tamil candidate, including the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organization (TELO) and the Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF), faced significant humiliation in elections when they contested independently before the formation of the Tamil National Alliance (TNA) by LTTE supremo Prabhakaran. Today, their leaders are seated in Parliament only because they contested as part of the TNA. In 2022, when the Illankai Tamil Arasu Kachchi (ITAK), the chief party in the TNA, announced it would contest independently, their future became uncertain. Consequently, they formed another alliance to capture votes, leading to this farce of a common Tamil candidate.

The irony is that Prabhakaran had killed the previous leaders of the parties now part of the Tamil National Alliance (TNA). The current leaders, without shame or honor, pretended their predecessors met their end due to something as absurd as snake bites or insect stings. They conveniently ignored the brutal reality of their predecessors' deaths and instead accepted Prabhakaran's orders to form the alliance.

These leaders, who owe their current positions to the very individual who eliminated their former leaders, are now forming yet another alliance. By pretending to unite under the guise of a common cause, they hope to manipulate the electorate once more.

No one has any shame!



Punitham Akka

Mahathaya's Saga:

Power, Paranoia, and Politics in the LTTE



BY:

Kaniyan Pungundran

கணியன் பூங்குன்றன்

Engineer and the Tragic Plight of Punitham Akka

Another person central to Mahathaya's story's brutal nexus was Manickavasagar Mahendraraja, also known as 'Engineer.' A talented mechanic from Punналаikadduvan, he was well-known in the region and once owned a mechanic shop at the north junction of Punналаikadduvan. Coming from a family of mechanics, with many relatives in the same profession, his skill as a mechanic and proficiency as a driver earned him the nickname 'Engineer.'

Punналаi Kadduvan, a small village, was once known as a haven for the LTTE. Following the assassination of Alfred Thuraiappa, it is believed that Prabhakaran sought refuge here to evade arrest. Notably, this area was the origin of prominent early LTTE members Ragavan and Iyer. From its inception, the LTTE had a substantial network in this area.

Engineer comes from a family with a strong background in mechanics, many of whom are in the same profession. His uncle, Mechanic Bala, was a tragic figure in this context. In 1983, Bala was killed by the LTTE, who mistakenly believed he was a spy for the Sri

Lankan army.

The circumstances surrounding Bala's alleged betrayal are subject to varying accounts. Some claim he was mistakenly suspected of leaking information about early LTTE members Ragavan and Ganeshan (Iyer) to the Sri Lankan army, leading to his elimination by the LTTE. Others suggest that the LTTE wrongly identified him as the informant who disclosed details about 'Avro' Kulam, an early associate of Velupillai Prabhakaran. 'Avro' Kulam became notorious for his alleged involvement in the Air Ceylon bombing at Ratmalana in September 1978.

Despite the tragedy of Bala's death, several members of his family, including his son Arivu, joined the LTTE. Arivu himself suffered a significant injury in battle, losing a leg. He now resides in Switzerland. Furthermore, reliable sources within the LTTE revealed to the Jaffna Monitor that Prabhakaran and top LTTE leaders subsequently expressed regret for the wrongful execution of Mechanic Bala, acknowledging his innocence.



Ganeshan Iyer



Raghavan

The man in the checked shirt is Raheem, spokesperson for Kittu, the then Jaffna commander of the LTTE. In front of him is Arivu, son of Mechanic Bala. The one holding a camera is Kittu, with a GPMG (General Purpose Machine Gun) on the ground, while the man squatting has a LAW (Light Anti-Tank Weapon) hanging on his shoulder. Jaffna, 1986.



'Avro' Kulam

Engineer, a close ally of Mahathaya, began his association as Mahathaya's driver and eventually became a trusted confidant. According to a source who spent ten days with Mahathaya in Jaffna, Mahathaya had two close associates in the region: Engineer and Nishanthan (Kumaravelu Vignarajah) from Achchuveli. Nishanthan, an infamous spy who infiltrated the ranks of the LTTE on behalf of the Sri Lankan army, provided meticulous

details about the 1985 attack on Pandithar (Sinnathurai Raveenthiran), the then Jaffna district commander of the LTTE before Kittu took charge. The story of Nishanthan and his betrayal warrants a dedicated chapter in this series.

Engineer's younger brother, Lt. Vasan (Manikkavasakar Kuvinthirarasa), joined the LTTE in the 1982/83 period. He played a leading role in the Jaffna Fort attack. Tragically, he died on May 21, 1985, during



Prominent LTTE fighters: Lt. Col. Johny on the right, Lt. Vasan in the middle, and Maavi on the left in the mid-1980s in Jaffna.

a roundup by the Sri Lankan Army in the Kurunagar area of Jaffna.

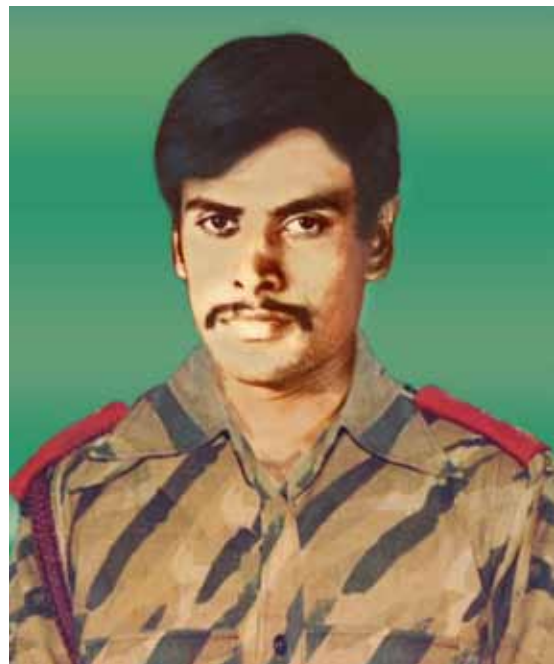
One of our sources, closely associated with Engineer in the LTTE, described him as self-aggrandizing and self-promoting, noticeably deficient in significant self-discipline. Unlike other LTTE members, who frequently shaved

their beards and maintained a neat and clean appearance, Engineer lacked these qualities. Our source noted that he often did not shave and did not wear neat and tidy clothes like other LTTE members.

This source also observed that Engineer, a short, slightly overweight, and somewhat



Nishanthan (Kumaravelu Vignarajah)



*Captain
Pandithar*



Prabhakaran with his deputy Mahathaya.

older-looking man, often spoke impulsively and with overconfidence, frequently overstating his qualifications. Furthermore, our source mentioned that Engineer was one of the chief, albeit informal, advisors to Mahathaya. However, our source believes that Engineer lacked the essential qualities to fulfil an advisory role, yet Mahathaya frequently sought his advice. According to our source, this situation not only highlights Engineer's overreach within Mahathaya's faction but also raises questions about Mahathaya's judgment in selecting his close allies.

Engineer sustained a severe injury in an operation at Tellippalai, leading to the loss of a leg. To acquire a prosthetic limb, the Jaipur foot, he travelled to India by country boat. Following Rajiv Gandhi's assassination, Engineer was arrested and imprisoned in India. Few Reports indicate that during his incarceration, he was approached and eventually convinced by the Indian intelligence wing to work for them.

One day, Engineer unexpectedly reappeared

in Jaffna. He had entered Sri Lanka via Katunayake Airport and subsequently travelled by road to Jaffna. His unimpeded journey raised suspicions with Pottu Amman, the ever-paranoid LTTE intelligence wing chief. Pottu Amman speculated that Engineer, a senior LTTE member distinguishable by his Jaipur foot, could not have successfully travelled through the high-security zones of Katunayake Airport, Colombo, and Vavuniya without arousing any suspicion. Consequently, under the directive of Pottu Amman, the LTTE's intelligence wing arrested him.

There are two differing theories about



Seelan (Charles Lucas Anthony)

Engineer. One group of former high-ranking LTTE officers, who spoke with the Jaffna Monitor, believes that Engineer was indeed a mole for RAW (Research and Analysis Wing, India's foreign intelligence agency). However, another faction of former LTTE leaders holds the opposite view, denying that he was a mole.

Those who believe Engineer was a RAW mole are divided into two subsets. The first group contends that he returned to Sri Lanka from India with critical coup information from RAW. This information allegedly involved

a plan to eliminate Prabhakaran and install Mahathaya as the LTTE leader, a plot which Engineer supposedly relayed to Mahathaya, implicating him in the conspiracy.

In contrast, the second set of sources, who also believe Engineer was a RAW mole, disputes this claim. They assert that while Engineer did become a RAW informant, he neither disclosed RAW's agenda to Mahathaya nor was Mahathaya agreeable to any plan proposed by RAW.

Another set of sources assert that Engineer was not a mole for RAW. Supporting this view is a former prominent LTTE member who wishes to remain unnamed and maintains that it was feasible for LTTE members to travel by flight via Katunayake Airport and safely reach their destinations. To illustrate, he refers to an incident from 1982 involving Seelan (Charles Lucas Anthony), the then-military chief of the LTTE.

Seelan accidentally shot himself in the chest while handling a gun in the presence of Nirmala and Nithiyanathan, who were LTTE supporters at the time. Gravely injured, Seelan urgently required medical attention. Nithiyanathan successfully transported Seelan to India through Katunayake Airport despite his severe chest wound.

Furthermore, this source argues that Engineer was not a widely recognized figure and did not appear to be a typical fighter. He mentioned that Engineer looked more mature to be a fighter and could have traveled through the airport to LTTE-controlled areas without arousing suspicion. This viewpoint challenges



Punitham Akka

the idea that Engineer was a RAW mole, suggesting that his passage through high-security zones might not have been as extraordinary or suspicious as Pottu Amman perceived.

Punitham Akka

Engineer's mother, Punithavathi (Manickavasagar Punithavathi), was a beloved figure in and around Punnai Kattuvan, affectionately known as 'Punitham Akka' and 'Punitham Amma'. To many, she was 'வீரத்தாய்' (meaning 'Brave Mother'), a term of deep respect and love used by everyone from Prabhakaran to the regular LTTE cadres. She wasn't just an early supporter of the LTTE; she was a maternal figure who opened her heart and home to the fighters, treating them as her own children. This profound care and compassion earned her their unwavering reverence and love, making her a true symbol of strength and nurturing in their eyes.

Her home was a sanctuary for the LTTE, always open and welcoming to fighters and supporters. In a heartfelt account to the Jaffna Monitor, one former LTTE leader shared how her house served as a refuge, a safe haven available around the clock. He fondly recalled arriving at her home with his fighters in the dead of night. Without hesitation, Punitham Akka would begin preparing puttu and a special Jaffna-style omelette. The distinctive aroma of her omelette, made with gingelly oil, remains etched in his memory, evoking deep feelings of warmth, comfort, and a profound sense of home.

Yet, as he reminisces, these warm memories are also tinged with immense guilt. He cannot forget the many unpleasant things that befell her after her son's arrest. Despite being a senior member of the LTTE, he had to witness

all these events in silence, unable to raise his voice, like a mute spectator. The love and care she showed them came at a great personal cost, and this bittersweet realization haunts him, casting a shadow over the fond memories of her unwavering hospitality and kindness.

Another former high-level officer of the LTTE disclosed to the Jaffna Monitor that upon Prabhakaran's return from India to Sri Lanka at the beginning of 1987, one of his first visits was to Punitham Akka's house. This highlights the deep affection Prabhakaran had for her. During this visit, he said that Prabhakaran took photos with her, as well as with the mother of another loyal supporter, Thadi (Beard) Mohan Mama. All these individuals hailed from Punnalaikadduvan, a village that had provided crucial support to Prabhakaran when he most needed it.

It's vital to recall that on July 23, 1983, the LTTE orchestrated an ambush on the Four Four Bravo patrol, an event that precipitated the Thirunelveli massacre and the Black July riots, signaling the start of the Sri Lankan Civil War. Following this, Prabhakaran fled to India and remained there for over three years before returning to Sri Lanka in early 1987.

A high-level LTTE source revealed to the Jaffna Monitor that when top LTTE commanders, including Pulenthi Amman (then the Trincomalee commander of the LTTE), visited Jaffna, they would often stay at Punitham Akka's house. He described how, during that tumultuous time, the atmosphere in Jaffna was largely supportive of the LTTE and other militant groups. However, Punitham Akka stood out not just for her words of encouragement but for her fearless actions.

He emphasized, "At that time, when we were fighting against the Sinhalese chauvinistic

government, what we needed was action, not words. Punitham Akka gave us that." Her home became a haven, her courage a beacon. She didn't just speak of support; she embodied it, risking everything for the cause she believed in. This unwavering dedication and tangible support earned her the profound respect and admiration of the LTTE commanders. Her bravery and selflessness left an indelible mark on those who fought alongside her, making her a true heroine in their eyes.

Even after many years, these LTTE leaders and fighters exude the same sentiment towards Punitham Akka. In our conversations with former LTTE fighters and leaders, we at the Jaffna Monitor can still feel and understand the deep respect and admiration they hold for her. She was one of the very few women who personally visited the Tigers' sentries, bringing not just food and tea, but warmth and comfort. Our source emphasized that she didn't just offer food; she prepared delicious meals infused with a mother's care and love.

During the tense period of the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF), when Prabhakaran retreated to the secluded Niththikaikulam in the Mulaitivu district, Punitham Akka braved the dangers to visit him. She was among the very few who reached this secretive location, staying by his side, even in the darkest times. Her presence brought a sense of home and hope to the fighters who were secluded in the Niththikaikulam forest, a former LTTE fighter who was present at Niththikaikulam told the Jaffna Monitor.

Another source revealed that she even nursed Prabhakaran's children, Charles Antony and Thuvaraga, though yet another source contests this claim. However, both sources agreed in their conversation with the Jaffna Monitor that Punitham Akka took care of Mahathaya's

children.

Another former LTTE leader relayed to the Jaffna Monitor that in 1986, Mahathaya founded an orphanage in the Manipai area of Jaffna, close to the Velakkai Pillaiyar Temple. He appointed Punitham Akka to oversee the orphanage, which provided shelter to around 25-30 young girls. Her care for these girls went beyond mere duty; she treated each child with deep maternal affection as if they were her own.

This former LTTE leader told the Jaffna Monitor that Punitham Akka's nurturing spirit transformed the orphanage into a sanctuary of love and security. Each girl found a mother in her, feeling cherished and protected amidst the chaos of their surroundings. Credible sources say that this orphanage later became the precursor to Prabhakaran's dream project, Sencholai, where the LTTE supremo cared for and nurtured hundreds of war orphans. It is said to be the project closest to his heart.

Even today, many women who grew up in the orphanage hold Punitham Akka in the highest regard, cherishing her as their Godmother. Her legacy of compassion, strength, and maternal love continues to resonate deeply within the hearts of these women, some of whom the Jaffna Monitor has had the opportunity to meet and talk with. These women fondly recall the warmth and care they received, often describing Punitham Akka as a guiding light during their most vulnerable times. Her influence and the love she bestowed upon them have left an indelible mark, shaping their lives and nurturing a spirit of resilience and hope.

After her son Engineer's arrest by the LTTE, Punitham Akka's revered status as the 'Brave Mother' began to wane. Locals and villagers

grew hesitant and afraid to interact with her or her family. Desperate for her son's release, she visited every LTTE camp, pleading with the leaders. She begged and cried before every LTTE leader who had once eaten from her hands, imploring them for her son's release or at least a chance to see him. She waited in front of the camps for days and nights, hoping for a glimpse of her son. Despite her persistent efforts, the LTTE leadership refused her pleas. She spent years waiting outside the LTTE camps, clinging to the hope of being reunited with her son.

The fighters inside the camp recounted harrowing accounts of her waiting for hours in the scorching sun, hoping for an update about her son. One of the fighters, who had once enjoyed her soulful meals, expressed his regret to the Jaffna Monitor. He said, "At that time itself, I felt sad and guilty, but you know, in the LTTE's structure, you should listen to our leadership even if our conscience says it's wrong."

A former LTTE leader drew a poignant parallel between Punitham Akka's situation, waiting outside the LTTE camp for her son's release, and that of Tamil mothers who waited in front of army camps for the release of their children. This former LTTE leader admitted to the Jaffna Monitor, with a sense of regret, that their organization's behaviour was, in this respect, similar to that of the Sri Lankan army.

The fate of Engineer remains unknown to this day. It is widely believed that he was executed by the LTTE. Some speculate that he may have died during interrogation due to brutal torture, but the truth remains a mystery.

A former LTTE leader, who once held a prominent position within the organization, confided to the Jaffna Monitor his belief



in Engineer's innocence. He revealed that the LTTE's intelligence wing had arrested Brigadier Theepan (Velayuthapillai Baheerathakumar), a one-time close ally of Mahathaya who later became the commander of the Northern Front, and Colonel Jeyam, a notable LTTE leader famous for his integrity and bravery, in connection with the Mahathaya case. Both were subjected to unimaginable torture. Their toenails were removed by Pottu Amman's brutal torture team, who were highly motivated, believing they were dealing with traitors to Tamil Eelam and Annan (Prabhakaran).

Despite this, they were eventually released and proved their loyalty by fighting for the LTTE until their final days. Brigadier Theepan died fighting in the infamous Battle of Aanandapuram in Iranaipalai. Although the LTTE leadership ordered him to evacuate the war zone and move to the Mullivaikal area—the last area that remained for the LTTE—

Theepan refused to leave his fighters and died on April 4. Similarly, Colonel Jeyam died on May 17.

Our source pointed out that Theepan and Jeyam might have been eliminated if they had not written a secret letter to Prabhakaran through his bodyguard, declaring their innocence and affirming their unwavering loyalty to Annan (Prabhakaran). Moved by their plea, Prabhakaran formed a new investigative team that eventually found them innocent.

Our sources say that while Theepan and Jeyam were found innocent and released, hundreds of innocent LTTE fighters who had taken up arms for the Tamil cause were not so lucky. They ended up being killed due to the paranoia and political maneuvers of the LTTE's intelligence wing chief, Pottu Amman.

He also shared a gripping story about a fighter who had been captured and brutally tortured by the LTTE's intelligence wing. After his release, this fighter reportedly confronted Pottu Amman, saying, "You suspected that we were ensnared in the web of Indian intelligence and acted as agents of RAW. But, in reality, it is you who are caught in their trap and acted as the RAW agent."

His close friend, a former LTTE fighter from Mahathaya's faction, later expanded on this topic in a conversation with the Jaffna Monitor. He explained that RAW intended to incite self-destruction within the LTTE through internal conflicts. He elaborated that Pottu Amman, entangled in this brutal nexus, inadvertently advanced RAW's objective. By killing hundreds of fighters under the suspicion that they were RAW agents, Pottu Amman, in effect, significantly aided RAW's strategy to destabilize the LTTE from within.

While sharing his views, similar to many former LTTE fighters and leaders, he used strong, unparliamentary language to describe Pottu Amman and his handling of Mahathaya's case. However, he also shared a sentiment common among many ex-LTTE members regarding Prabhakaran, saying, 'அண்ணன் பாலம் அவருக்கு பொட்டனிண்ட விளையாட்டுகள் தெரியாது,' which translates to 'Poor Annan (Prabhakaran). He doesn't know the games of Pottu Amman.' This reflects a sense of empathy for Prabhakaran, suggesting a belief that he was unaware of the manipulative tactics employed by Pottu Amman.

Another LTTE leader who held a prominent position shared a perspective with us that resonated with a section of former LTTE fighters. "Annan (Prabhakaran) was considered the de facto god," he said. "There was a belief that even a dog couldn't go to shit in the LTTE-held area without Annan's knowledge. So how, then," he argued, "did these many killings happen in the name of destroying traitors without Annan knowing? How could Pottu Amman alone orchestrate these many killings? This is rubbish."

He continued, "While, of course, Pottu (Pottu Amman) played his own manipulative games, it's compulsory to acknowledge the painful truth. While I still respect Annan (Prabhakaran) immensely, this whole mess—Annan bears a large part of the responsibility. Annan's paranoia and his philosophy of 'kill the person who even thought of killing you in their dreams' ignited this whole mess. He can't just escape blame," he concluded.

Punitham Akka passed away in March 2021, all alone. She had given birth to five children, but none were by her side when she took her

last breath, as all had tragically died before her. Her elder daughter met a heartbreaking end, accidentally drowning in the well at their home. One son, overwhelmed by despair, took his own life. Another succumbed to a debilitating illness. Her son, Lt. Vasan, died a hero, fighting for the LTTE. The fate of her son, Engineer, remains a mystery, though it is widely believed that he was killed by the LTTE.

Punitham Akka, a woman who had selflessly nurtured, sheltered, and fed countless fighters, was left to die in heartbreaking solitude. In her final days, she was abandoned by fate, empty and sorrowful. Those who were with her told the Jaffna Monitor that she spent her last moments in a vain and desperate search for her elder son, Engineer, though parts of her contemplated that he was no more.

Her life, filled with immense sacrifices, ended in heart-wrenching loneliness. She had given everything for the vision of Tamil Eelam, yet was left to die like an orphan by the very cause she dedicated her life to. How can one explain this to her? While one of her sons died heroically fighting for the LTTE, her other son, also an LTTE fighter, was killed by the LTTE itself, branded a traitor.

Punitham Akka's story is not unique. Many mothers, like her, were ensnared in this brutal web, losing their lives and their beloved children. The anguish of these mothers, who sacrificed everything only to be betrayed by the cause they served, is a haunting testament to the profound and often overlooked human cost of the Tamil Eelam conflict. These women, who gave their all for a dream of freedom and dignity, were left with nothing but grief and desolation.

NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Readers,

"Mahathaya's Saga: Power, Paranoia, and Politics in LTTE" is a series that is very near to my heart and resonates deeply with many of you. It has brought many hardcore readers to the Jaffna Monitor, for which I am immensely grateful.

As the editor of the Jaffna Monitor, I am often overwhelmed with the demands of my work. Writing this series requires immense dedication, extensive fieldwork, and a significant amount of time. Consequently, I have been unable to continue the series in the last few issues.

I sincerely apologize for this interruption and any disappointment it may have caused. Please rest assured, this does not mean I have stopped it. I will start writing it again, though I cannot promise to release it every fortnight. Nevertheless, I am committed to continuing this important series and sharing it with you as often as possible.

Thank you for your understanding and continued support.

Sincerely,

கணியன் பூங்குன்றன்
Kaniyan Pungundran
Editor- Jaffna Monitor

Humanitarian Diaries

Final
Part

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



BY:

Kaniyan Pungundran

கணியன் பூங்குன்றன்

Niththilan (name changed), a former United Nations worker of extraordinary courage, witnessed the harrowing final chapter of Sri Lanka's war in 2009. As one of the few who can bear witness to the unspeakable atrocities committed by both the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE, he played a pivotal role during the conflict's closing stages. In September 2008, following the evacuation directive for UN and international humanitarian organizations from LTTE-controlled territories, Niththilan was thrust into a critical position. Appointed as the officer in charge of all UN operations in the region, he navigated the chaos, leading the mission and directing local staff amidst the absence

of his international colleagues. Now, living in Europe, Niththilan has chosen to break his silence, sharing his untold story with 'Jaffna Monitor'—under the veil of anonymity.

What other atrocities related to forced enlistment by the LTTE did you witness?

Many atrocities could fill a thousand-page book, but one incident remains vividly etched in my memory. It took place in the Mathalan area, right across from the UN complex. Opposite our complex was the Mathalan hospital, and next to it, the Tamil Eelam police had an office in a house. The notorious child abductor Kannathasan lived and operated from there.

The Tamil Eelam police were deeply involved in the abduction of children, and every day, desperate parents flocked to the house,

weeping and begging for their children's release. Their cries of anguish echoed through the area, a constant reminder of the suffering inflicted upon them. One day, an elderly man, around 65 years old, arrived at the police house. He was visibly weak, his face etched with exhaustion and sorrow. His voice cracked as he cried loudly, pleading for the release of his only daughter, who had been taken by the LTTE the day before.

An argument broke out between the LTTE guards and the old man. The guards, cold and unfeeling, tried to push him away. But in a desperate act of defiance, the old man threw a bicycle chain cover at a female LTTE guard who was shoving him. What happened next was nothing short of a war crime and a crime against humanity. All the LTTE guards, both male and female, descended upon that frail old man with sticks, rods, and poles. They beat him viciously, their blows fueled by a merciless rage. His cries of pain were heart-wrenching, and I could feel my own heart breaking as I watched, powerless to intervene.



The beating left him nearly dead, and they dragged his half-conscious body to the adjacent hospital. Before leaving, they warned the doctors not to treat him. Despite the danger, our brave doctors chose to act with compassion and humanity. They provided him with the treatment he so desperately needed. Yet, deep down, I knew that the old man would not survive the brutal assault. The image of his broken body and the sounds of his suffering haunt me to this day

How did Sri Lankan Tamil parents manage to hide and protect their children from being forcibly abducted by the LTTE?

For Sri Lankan Tamils, children are everything, and protecting them from the LTTE's forced abductions was an incredibly difficult struggle. Many parents resorted to marrying off their children at a young age, hoping this would provide some protection. In some cases, daughters would wear their mothers' Thali (a sacred necklace symbolizing marital status and respect

in Tamil culture) and pretend to be married.

Every household had a hiding place, often a small, inconspicuous hole inside the house. No matter where they went, they would create a secret spot to conceal their children. Parents would hide their children in petrol barrels, diesel barrels, or any other hidden places they could find. I know that in every house, there was a hiding place for children. All my relatives had one. The ingenuity and determination of these parents were extraordinary as they fought to keep their children safe from the brutal abduction teams of the LTTE.

I remember one heartbreaking incident involving a Grama Niladhari from Vadamarachchi, Alaiyavalai, at the beginning of the last Eelam war in 2007. He was transferred to the Vanni region and had one son and one daughter. His daughter was very young, while his son was around 16 years old. Fearing that the LTTE would forcibly enlist his son, he hid him masterfully. One day, he received a letter from the LTTE demanding that he enlist his son. Despite the dire warning that hiding his son was a crime, he continued to keep him hidden, refusing to surrender his child to the mindless motives of the LTTE.

The LTTE's patience wore thin. They eventually took the Grama Niladhari in a jeep to the war front in the Muhamalai region, where the fighting was intense and the shelling relentless. He was forced to dodge live shelling and constant gunfire, each explosion shaking his resolve and filling him with dread. Under this immense pressure and terror, his determination to keep his son hidden began to crumble. The LTTE threatened him with death and worse if he did not comply.

In a moment of unbearable desperation, he lost his resolve and revealed his son's hiding place. The militants went back and dragged the boy out, forcibly enlisting him into their ranks. The father's heart shattered as he watched his

son, whom he had tried so hard to protect, being taken away. His and his family's screams of protest and the boy's cries for help echoed hauntingly, but there was nothing he could do.

Tragically, the boy was dead within two months, a casualty in the Forward Defence Line (FDL). The news of his son's death broke him completely.

I met the Grama Niladhari in Manik Farm in Vavuniya. He looked like a living corpse, his eyes hollow and devoid of life, bearing the immense pain of having been forced to betray his own son due to LTTE coercion.

In one instance, an acquaintance of mine pretended to be mentally retarded to evade forced conscription. Thankfully, he escaped enlistment and now lives abroad.

Within families, disputes often arose about who should join the LTTE, but no one wanted to enlist voluntarily. Those who genuinely desired to fight had already joined the LTTE long ago. The remaining individuals were unwilling to take up arms.

Given the LTTE's utter foolishness and lack of strategy, why would these people sacrifice their children? What logic is there in that? The LTTE leadership lacked political acumen, foresight, and diplomacy. Why would anyone expect parents to give their children to the LTTE's madness? In the last war, the majority of parents questioned why they should sacrifice their children for the LTTE's irrational, foolish actions. In the final months of the war, I'm sure no Tamil in the war zone supported the LTTE or its armed struggle.

Did the LTTE really use Tamil people as human shields, or as a few Tamil politicians claim, did these people choose not to leave the LTTE and stay in the war zone?

The LTTE's use of the general public as human shields wasn't a desperate measure adopted in the final war—it was a long-standing, ruthless strategy. Long before the last war, when the LTTE controlled Jaffna before 1995, they were already employing this grim tactic. Civilians were constantly caught in the crossfire, their lives used as pawns in a brutal game.

The LTTE leadership demonstrated time and again that they had no respect whatsoever for Tamil lives. They saw civilians not as people to protect but as tools to further their agenda.

In fact, when the LTTE introduced travel passes, they started using Tamil civilians as human shields. That is the truth. Without restrictions, the LTTE knew with absolute certainty that the people would leave them and they would be finished in a few weeks or even days.

The harsh yet absolute truth is that the LTTE never wanted to fight the Sinhala army alone; they always wanted to fight while keeping Tamil civilians as human shields. In the last war, no one wanted to stay with the LTTE. Every civilian, including the families of LTTE fighters, wanted to leave. People began to escape, and without any shame or regret, the LTTE leadership gave the order to shoot those who tried to flee the war zone.

I remember attending a meeting in the second week of February 2009 in the Mathalan area. This meeting with the general public was attended by Soosai, the Sea Tiger head, and Nadesan, the LTTE's political head. I recall Nadesan saying, "I have ordered to shoot those who escape the war zone. Whoever escapes the war zone is a traitor to the Tamil Eelam. They are leaving because they don't believe in the Tamil struggle." He shamefully later surrendered to the military with a white flag. What followed is well known.

Soosai gave a fiery speech, declaring that the

innocent Tamils fleeing LTTE-held areas were traitors and shamelessly boasting that he rewarded those who shot at the escaping people. Yet, in May 2009, he brazenly sent his wife and children in a Sea Tigers boat, guarded by the Sea Tigers, to escape the war zone with lots of money and gold. This blatant hypocrisy and betrayal highlight the LTTE leadership's utter disregard for the very people they claimed to protect.

Soosai ordered hundreds of shootings of those trying to escape the war zone. Under his command, his Sea Tigers shot and killed hundreds of innocent Tamils who were desperately fleeing. Yet, he had the audacity to send his wife and children in a Sea Tigers boat, protected by his own forces. This is the most brutal betrayal anyone could inflict on the Tamil community: protecting his own family while thousands of innocent people died in the war zone.

This betrayal is not just a mere act of hypocrisy; it is a profound and heart-wrenching act of treachery. Imagine the anguish of families who were forced to stay, facing relentless shelling and gunfire, while the leaders who proclaimed their undying dedication to the Tamil cause quietly ensured the safety of their own loved ones.

In one incident, a good number of the LTTE leaders sent their sons and daughters out of the war zone by hiding them in a UN convoy that came to the war zone in April 2009. Remember one thing: while the majority of the LTTE's leaders died in battle or after surrendering to the Sri Lankan army, most of these leaders' children somehow escaped the war zone and now live comfortably in foreign countries. That is not the case with the innocent Tamils. This duplicity laid bare the LTTE leadership's true priorities. They were willing to let thousands of innocent people die in the war zone while they secured their own families' safety.

How many Tamils were shot and killed by the LTTE while attempting to escape the war zone?

The LTTE opened fire indiscriminately, without regard to age or gender, on those who tried to escape the war zone. In my estimation, before I escaped the war zone in April 2009, at least 300-400 people were killed by the LTTE while trying to flee, including infants, children, and the elderly. The LTTE ensured there was no breach in their human shield.

In one particularly harrowing incident, a group of desperate people tried to escape in broad daylight through Nandhi Kadal. Among them was a father carrying his 3-year-old daughter on his shoulders. I witnessed an LTTE fighter shoot the girl in her leg. Overcome with anger, I confronted him, asking why he shot the little girl instead of her father. Even though shooting the father would have been equally abhorrent, I questioned his cruel choice. His callous reply still haunts me: "If I shot her father, they might abandon him and leave. But they can't abandon a child. They all have to come back."

How can anyone expect people to stay with the LTTE when there was no food, no shelter, and indiscriminate shelling from the army?

There was one incident that involved me personally. In the last phase of the war, an ICRC ship arrived with food and medicine, and an international staff member named Julian, an old friend of mine, came along with the ship. He disembarked and came to the seashore, where approximately 1,000 Tamil civilians encircled him.

Before that day, a large number of people had tried to escape from the LTTE-controlled Mathalan to the Chundikulam area, and the Tigers opened fire on them, resulting in many deaths. I saw the bodies of three young children from that incident. The people encircled Julian and demanded that the ICRC

evacuate them, or else they wouldn't let Julian leave. They also brought the bodies of the civilians who were shot dead by the LTTE in the previous night's escape attempt.

The situation was tense. I had no choice but to inform my office in Vavuniya from my satellite phone that Julian was essentially being held by the civilians. Our UN office then informed the ICRC, who in turn informed the Norwegian embassy. The Norwegian ambassador spoke with Nadesan. Soon after, 100 LTTE guards arrived, fully armed. They brutally beat the civilians and arrested them. I later heard that the civilians leading the protest were beaten to death by the LTTE.

Did you meet Julian again?

No, he did not come back to Mathalan. He was kept hostage for almost three hours.

Did people beat him?

No, they treated him respectfully but confiscated all the communication sets. However, they beat a national staff member of the ICRC, claiming he had mistranslated to Julian.

Did the ICRC report this incident?

No. The ICRC has a policy of non-interference. They see all the atrocities but don't report them. That is their policy.

Many people have mentioned in casual conversations that one of the reasons for the LTTE's defeat was Charles Antony, Prabhakaran's son. What is your assessment of him?

Yes, that's a valid observation. Although I have never met him or personally interacted with him, and I don't have much knowledge about his military capabilities, I was deeply saddened and angered by one of his actions.



In the Northern Province, the Tamil Rehabilitation Organization (TRO), a humanitarian arm of the LTTE, operated with remarkable success and dedication. They were the first responders to any calamity in the northern region, providing many excellent services with limited resources. For 20-25 years, they did excellent work, and no one should have any doubt about that.

Suddenly, the LTTE started a new arm called Uthavum Karangal (Helping Hands) to do the same work TRO had been doing. Charles Antony was appointed as its head. This new arm was established when the war was at its peak, around November or December 2008. It's important to note that the TRO was functioning very well, and there was no need for a new arm. However, Prabhakaran formed this new organization to give his son a role to play.

I don't believe Charles Antony had any real understanding of rehabilitation. He gathered around 100 youths and, despite the severe shortages during the peak of the war, provided them all with T-shirts bearing the name "Uthavum Karangal." He was granted many resources that the TRO was denied, including numerous tractors and lorries. In an LTTE-held area, no one could refuse Prabhakaran's son. As a result, he had access to many such resources and essentially played with them like toys.

My understanding is that he suddenly felt the need to open a humanitarian arm, so his father obliged and provided him with the necessary resources. This move deeply disappointed many dedicated TRO workers and other aid workers, including myself. Many TRO workers shared the

same sentiment with me, but how could anyone living in an LTTE-controlled area question the choices of its leader? So, we stayed silent.

How did you feel when you learned that Prabhakaran was dead and the LTTE's armed struggle came to a brutal end?

When this happened, we were out of Manik Farm, a displacement camp in Vavuniya. As a long-time resident of the Vanni region who knew the terrain and the capabilities of the LTTE, I was certain that this outcome was inevitable. When Kilinochchi fell to the army, I knew that the LTTE was going to be vanquished in the most brutal way.

The LTTE took up arms to fight against the government, so perishing or winning is an expected fate for a militant group. However, they had no right to drag innocent Tamils into the jaws of war. In the final days of the conflict, the LTTE had no fighters and no proper arms; it was like a hermit kingdom, abandoned by everyone, including the international community. No international body recognized the LTTE, and no countries attempted to protect them. The LTTE fought a mindless war on their own.

I never liked Prabhakaran's politics, his dictatorship, monopoly, and his belief that only he should lead the struggle. However, he was undeniably a true warrior. If he had wanted to escape the war zone or ensure his family's escape, he had multiple ways to do so, but he did not. He did not even attempt to save any members of his family. He let everyone perish in the war. I believe he thought, "I started this war; let it end with me," so he stayed in the war zone until the very end.

A close ally of Prabhakaran, whom I later met in Switzerland, told me that Prabhakaran had said, "I am responsible for the suffering our

Tamil community endures. If I die fighting, the Sri Lankan army must capture my body and identify it as mine so they will leave my people alone, allowing them to live peacefully." I believe this is why Prabhakaran stayed and why his body was recovered.

In reality, the pre-forced enlistment era of the LTTE's war was a golden period; I could say it was heaven on earth. Every time we passed the Omanthai point to enter LTTE-held areas, I felt like I was entering heaven. That feeling of self-rule and self-determination is indescribable. There were no worries and no fear; women could roam freely in the middle of the night. Regardless of high petrol prices or a lack of electricity, for me and many others, it was heaven on earth. Even though we understood the shortcomings in terms of human rights and the inability to speak against the LTTE, we cherished that life.

Despite having the qualities of a dictator, Prabhakaran ensured that everyone in his territory could live with dignity and peace, although this scenario changed drastically in the final war.

What troubles me is that those who now claim to be tigers and tiger supporters and proudly beat the drums of the LTTE's legacy are not willing to light a candle for the person who, despite his wrongdoings, perished with his entire family and fought with his last bullet and last fighter for a cause he completely believed in. This is sad and makes me furious.

The End

Note: In a few months, this exclusive testimony will be available as a book with additional information, published by Jaffna Monitor Publications.

"Women Must Cast Aside the Hesitations That Impede the Revelation of Their Talents"

- Gayathri Asai Rasiah

By: Our Reporter

Gayathri is an emerging poet making her mark in the literary world with the recent release of her debut poetry collection, "இருட்டின் காதலி" (The Lover of Darkness). She holds a Bachelor's, Master's, and M.Phil in Bharatanatyam from various universities in Tamil Nadu, India. Currently, she serves as a Development Officer at the Jaffna Zonal Education Office and has contributed to "Thaiveedu" magazine.

Gayathri's distinguished career in dance has now evolved to include poetry, further showcasing her multifaceted talent and expanding her creative horizons.

Additionally, it is noteworthy that Gayathri is the only daughter of the esteemed and revered artist Asai Rasiah, considered one of the world-renowned painters and a symbol of Jaffna.

What were the inspirations behind writing your first poetic collection, "இருட்டின் காதலி" (The Lover of Darkness), and what are you hoping to achieve with its release?

I find joy in savoring the essence of life to its fullest. Living intertwined with the arts enriches my existence and fills my soul with happiness. The arts play a vital

role in preserving my identity throughout my journey. In this context, my maiden creation, "Iruttin Kaadhali" (The Lover of Darkness), has not only mirrored my life but also echoed the lives of my fellow companions. This poetry collection embodies the outpourings of a woman who, after basking in her father's love and care until age 38, endeavors to immortalize her experiences and lamentations following his loss.

I aspired for the release of this poetry collection to transcend a mere book launch. Hence, I unveiled some of the poems through visual displays and performance art. I chose a traditional house and meticulously crafted various visual setups for this. I desired visitors to immediately sense the essence of the book's title as they entered the abode. After moving through the displays, the book release was graciously conducted in the open, under the tranquil shade of a neem tree in the backyard. I now feel a profound contentment with the elegance and grace of the "Iruttin Kaadhali" launch. Additionally, the accolades and appreciation from many continue to pour in.

Are there any personal experiences or specific events that influenced the poems in this collection?

Joy and sorrow are universal to all human beings. Happiness, melancholy, despair, solitude, separation, and loss are emotions that have indelibly marked us all. We have traversed many a bitter experience and still relish many a sweet memory. In this light, the myriad blissful yet some bitter encounters I have faced in my life are the wellspring of my writings. I hold dialogues with my poems. Thus, today, I speak to the world through the medium of poetry. Like a steadfast companion, my poems journey with me, offering solace and clarity.

In the current landscape of Jaffna, we see a rare emergence of women



writers. What do you think are the reasons behind this? What steps do we need to take to encourage and support more women to pursue writing as a society?

The right to sculpt our lives and the liberty to live them reside within us. The fervor to write and the zeal to cultivate it must first blossom within. Women must cast aside the hesitations that impede the revelation of their talents. Frequently, women fear scrutiny should they dare to pen their thoughts. Indeed, questions will arise. I first etched my poems on Facebook's canvas. Many who perused them would call, inquiring, "Is there some turmoil in the family?" All they sought was an update, nothing more. We must learn to traverse such inquiries with a smile. Our journey towards our aspirations should proceed with quiet determination. Women possess the swiftness and managerial prowess to juggle multiple tasks with finesse. The obstacles to nurturing these abilities must be viewed as challenges to be met with courage.

How has growing up in Jaffna influenced your writing?

Though my father, Asai Rasiah, was a celebrated painter, to me, he embodied the

essence of a polymath. The poem he composed after beholding me for the first time in the hospital and those he penned after perusing my childhood photographs evoke a singular bliss when read.

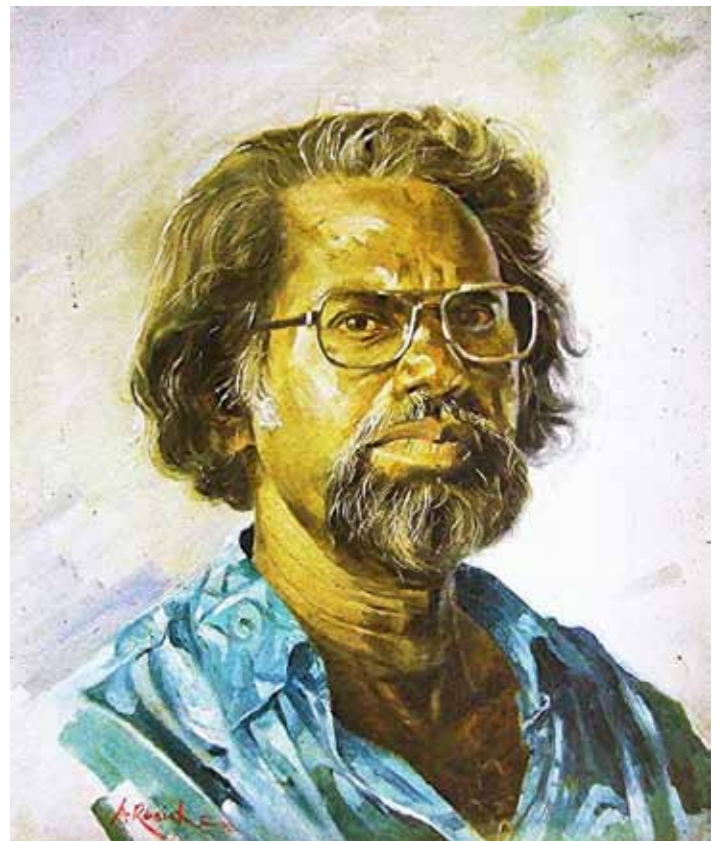
One of his friends, the esteemed poet and medical doctor, 'Kaapiyakko' Jinnah Sherifdeen, once visited our home with his nephew, E. Samad, a traditional poet. E. Samad, in appreciation of our hospitality, composed traditional poetry. My father, in turn, crafted a poetic response.

In his book "Vimbam," he meticulously inscribed fitting poems beneath his paintings, all adhering to classical forms. Thus, my passion for poetry was kindled by my father.

How does your current interest in reading compare to when you were a kid or schoolgirl? Do you think the prevalence of high-tech gadgets and smartphones has affected the literary culture in Jaffna?

In my home, there exists a cherished personal library. It holds not only my father's professional tomes but also the works of literary giants like Sandilyan, Kalki, and Sujatha. During my school days, my father would gift me Rani Comics, Gokulam, and Panchatantra tales. I would eagerly devour the adventures of Mayavi in Rani Comics, my eyes wide with wonder. In contrast to the present era of sophisticated communication devices, I find that the times spent reading by the glow of an oil lamp and gathering to share stories under the moonlight were the true harbingers of joy and imagination, fostering a sense of well-being that modern times often lack.

Your father, Asai Rasaiya, is considered one of the best painters



Self-portrait of Asai Rasaiya

Jaffna has ever produced. How did his upbringing and teachings influence you, and what inspired you to pursue a passion for writing instead of painting? How did his philosophy and artistic influence shape your approach to writing?

My father never imposed his artistic profession or any other field upon me. However, due to being born into an artistic family, expressions related to these fields have been present within me since childhood. At the age of three, I was enrolled in Bharatanatyam classes. As I grew older, he would take me to evening classes for vocal music and violin under the tutelage of respective teachers. For my advanced studies, I chose Bharatanatyam as a subject. Subsequently, I went to India to pursue my degree in Bharatanatyam. It was only after my father's passing that I began to focus my attention on poetry. Thus, I did not have the opportunity to receive his guidance or influence in this realm.

To Hope or Not?

A Sri Lankan fan's conundrum



By:
**Dr. Aravinthan
Arunthavanathan**

Should we dare to hope? What is life without hope? And what is Sri Lankan cricket without hope? Hope can be both inspiring and agonizing. If you're a Sri Lankan fan, you've experienced the highs and the heartbreaks. But here we go again.



The recently concluded Lanka Premier League was bittersweet. The close contests, improved batting conditions, and most of the national players hitting form were major positives. Yet, beyond all that, it emphasized one crucial point: the players forming the national squad are the best our system has produced, and there is no concrete evidence to suggest otherwise. This alone is an uncomfortable reality. If this is the best set of players we have, can we truly aspire to a better future when the 2026 World T20 takes place in our own backyard?

You may wonder why one should think about a tournament two years in advance. In reality, this build-up will breeze through. With T20Is being few and far between, and Sri Lankan players not highly sought after in major T20 leagues, the scope for auditions is limited. This

means every game matters—even the LPL matters. However, while the LPL is intended to be a breeding ground for the national T20 setup, it falls short of this goal. The auction dynamics and selection decisions all point to the same conclusion. One can't complain, as franchise cricket is run with the interests of the franchise in mind. A glaring observation was that almost no young players got enough game time in the top order during this LPL. It was either the national or international players who dominated these crucial phases.

In this context, the question that should be at the top of any fan's mind is: What should the Sri Lankan management focus on? To begin with, Sri Lanka's T20 campaign was a disaster, mainly due to a lack of awareness and poor strategy. As frustrating as this is, there is a silver lining. While skill sets are hard to develop in short time spans, strategy is an

evolving factor. If used correctly, it can act as a massive tailwind.

Sri Lanka's obsession with bits-and-pieces players as all-rounders has been a major factor derailing our cricket. The decision to boost the batting at the expense of a solid bowling option was a low point in the World T20, which ended our hopes in the game against Bangladesh. Sri Lanka needs to come to terms with the fact that we don't have players of the caliber of Jayasuriya or Dilshan to fulfill that role perfectly. Sri Lanka must commit to playing five solid bowling options and utilize Wanindu Hasaranga as an all-rounder at number six.

Chamindu Wickramasinghe, a promising young all-rounder known for his aggressive batting and reliable medium-pace bowling, could be a valuable addition to the team. With Dasun Shanaka not making the most of his opportunities, Wickramasinghe at number seven would be a good option to explore in the short run while hoping Shanaka finds his way back.

Sri Lanka has a rich bowling attack that shall remain the frontline option. However, what will be key to continuous success are the backup options available. Dushan Hemantha seems to have edged out Vijayakanth Viyaskanth in this year's edition. Viyaskanth, who was part of the reserves for the World Cup, needed a strong tournament performance to earn a call-up to the main squad for the upcoming Indian series. Unfortunately, his dip in performance has come at the wrong time, which may act as a setback but could also be a valuable learning experience in his budding career. While the LPL didn't reveal any new potential finds, if Sri Lanka uses its current resources prudently, the options by 2026 could be more than decent.

As for the batting, the questions are obvious, but the answers are not yet clear. Asalanka, in a leadership capacity, is expected to slot in at number five, while Nissanka seems set to open. Mendis will be expected to find his form and continue at the top, while Kamindu and Avishka are good options for the three and four positions. Despite stellar performances in the LPL, both Kusal Janith and Dinesh Chandimal seem to be less attractive options for the long term due to past failures. A hopeful option is Janith Liyanage, who has performed well in limited opportunities and can be expected to be part of the plans as the Sri Lankan camp approaches the 2026 World Cup.

While it may seem unrealistic, based on facts and logic, Sri Lanka should brace themselves to fare much better in 2026. The journey starts with the Indian series. Irrespective of the outcome, hopefully, sense and stability will prevail in the system to ensure that Sri Lanka does not approach the next edition of the World Cup like a student turning up for an exam unaware of which sections will be questioned.

Sri Lanka's anachronistic approaches and choices have pushed the game down the drain, much to the frustration of a loyal fanbase. The lead-up to and culmination of the upcoming T20 cycle will be interesting, with much scrutiny on decisions and choices. The stakes are high, and as a fan, you can't do much but hope.

Hope is inspiring; hope is painful. What will it be this time? Only time will tell how hope serves Sri Lankan fans in this World T20 cycle

The story of how Navalar brought Ramanathan into politics



By:
**Sarawanan Komathi
Nadarasa**



Arumuka Navalar

Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan

The year 1879 is filled with significant historical events, especially in Tamil history. In the three preceding years, a cholera epidemic engulfed Jaffna, resulting in the deaths of approximately 7,000 people. As a result of the anti-cholera relief efforts, many

prominent Tamils united regardless of caste or religion. By 1879, the cholera epidemic had ended, and the situation returned to normal. This year marks the death of Arumuka Navalar and Sir Muthucomaraswamy. It was also the year Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan

entered politics. Ramanathan, who was raised under the care of his maternal uncle, Sir Muthucomaraswamy, began his political career during this significant year.

On May 4, 1879, Sir Muthucomaraswamy passed away. From 1862 until his death, he served as a member of the Legislative Council. His death created a vacancy in the Legislative Council. In the contest for his vacant seat, the Catholic candidate Christopher Britto received the support of Thirumeniar Venkatasamalapillai, the great-grandfather of LTTE supremo Prabhakaran. Venkatasalampillai believed that appointing Britto, a Catholic known for his long experience in public service, his prominence as a social worker, district judge, and Queen's Counsel, through the Governor's nomination would avoid religious discrimination among Sri Lankan Tamils and promote unity and service among the people.

However, in that contest, due to the intense campaigning by Arumuka Navalar, who promoted the slogan "Saiva Vellalar," Ponnambalam Ramanathan, a high-caste Vellalar, was appointed to the position by the Governor. Navalar completed this task and passed away a few months later, on December 5, 1879.

In reality, Ramanathan was not well-known in the North at that time. Coomaraswamy's family was based in Colombo, and Britto was more well-known than Ramanathan. The political contest between Britto and Ramanathan is very significant in history. Even today, whenever Ramanathan's entry into politics is mentioned, it is often summarized as "Navalar brought him into politics." However, we need to view this historical event as part of the Jaffna-Saiva-Vellalar dynamic that was occurring behind the scenes.

Christopher Brito

Christopher Brito's father, Philip Brito, was from Puttalam and was known as a prominent Mudaliyar and a government registrar. Brito received his education at Colombo Academy, which is known today as Royal College. He was the first Sri Lankan to graduate from the University of Calcutta.

Subsequently, he served as a professor at Agra University. Upon returning to Sri Lanka, he worked as a professor of mathematics at Colombo Academy, where he had studied. In 1867, he began practicing as a barrister in the Supreme Court and later served as a judge in the districts of Batticaloa, Jaffna, and Colombo. Brito was a well-known figure, influential as a Queen's Counsel. From January to December 1872, he was a member of the Colombo Municipal Council.¹ He also served as the president of the Bar Association.² Brito was proficient in Tamil, Sinhala, English, Latin, Greek, Sanskrit, and Pali.

He also served as the president of the Catholic Union of Ceylon.³ According to the Ferguson Directory (1905-1906), he was a plantation owner as well.⁴

1 DICTIONARY OF BIOGRAPHY of the Tamils of Ceylon Compiled by S.Arumugam, 1997

2 CENTENARY VOLUME of the Colombo Municipal Council 1865-1965 - By H. A. J. HULUGALLE - Published by the Colombo Municipal Council (september 1965)

3 Ferguson's Ceylon Directory 1905-1906 (P.868)

4 These property details are found in the details of the case in which the property given by the father-in-law Nannithambi later went up to the case of the children's property dispute. (BRITO v. MUTHUNAYAGAM. 331—D. C. Negombo, 9,946. <http://www.lawnet.gov.lk/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/006-NLR-NLR-V-19-BRITO-v.-MUTHUNAYAGAM.pdf>)

Christopher Brito's Contribution to Tamil Cultural Studies

While the Mahavamsa is celebrated by the Sinhalese as the history of Sri Lanka, it can be said to be the history of the Sinhalese Buddhists. Similarly, the works that are still used today to understand the history of the Jaffna Tamils include "Kailaya Malai," "Vaiya Padal," "Pararajasekaran Ula," "Raja Murai," and "Yalpana Vaipava Malai." Of these, the "Yalpana Vaipava Malai" was first written in 1736⁵ by Mayilvaganapulavar at the request by the Dutch Governorship of Jan Maccara. However, it was first printed only in 1884.⁶ Based on this book, in 1928, Swami Gnanapragasar published a work titled "Yalpana Vaipava Vimarsanam – Tamilarasar Uham." In his publication, he addresses the inconsistencies he found in the "Yalpana Vaipava Malai."⁷ His important critical essay, "Sources of the Yalpana Vaipava Malai," was

5 Later, the "yalpana Vaibhava Malai" went to the British Library and copied it and it was published by Mudaliar Kula Sabanathan to re-publish it. Although Brito's book mentions that the original work was published by Mayilvahana Pulavar in 1736, Kula Sabanathan's book "Yaazhpaana Vaibhava Maalai" may have been written about 50 years before that, especially examining the discrepancies in the information about the life of the Mayilvahana poet and examining the discrepancies in the information about the life of the Mayilvaganapulavar from the middle of the 18th century to the 19th century. It is logically argued that it must have existed until the beginning of the 19th century. (Mudaliar Kula Sabanathan - Yalpana Vaibhava Malai - "Eelakesari" edited by Mr. N. Ponniah, Principal - 1949)

6 "Yalpana Vaibhava Maalai" by Mathagal Mayilvahana Pulavar – Research Notes by Mudaliar Kula Sabanathan - Department of Hindu Religious and Cultural Affairs - 1995

7 Gnanaprakasara and Swami - Yalpana Vaibhava Review - Achchuvely - The Gnanaprakasa Yantra salai - 1928



Sir Muthu Coomaraswamy

published in English under the title "Revd. S. Gnanaprakasara - Sources of the Yalpana Vaipava Malai".⁸

One and a half centuries after the original book was written, Brito first translated it from Tamil to English. This translation was published in 1879. Interestingly, this means that the "Yalpana Vaipava Malai" was available in English even before it was printed in Tamil.⁹ Today, Brito's English translation remains an essential document for studying the history of Jaffna. It is not merely a translation but includes many annotations, footnotes, and explanations, showcasing Brito's research expertise. When exploring Brito's background, it is evident that he had a deep and inquisitive

8 Ceylon Antiquary And Literary Register Vol.6 (1920-1921) by Office Of The Times Of Ceylon - 1920

9 C. BRITO - The Yalpana-vaipava-malai, or, The History of the Kingdom of Jaffna - Translated from the Tamil with an appendix and a glossary - Asian educational services New Delhi - Madras - 1999. (First Published: Colombo, 1879)

knowledge of history. This is particularly apparent in the records of the Ceylon Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, where he made numerous contributions to history, literature, and politics.

For this translation, he compared many other historical texts. During his research, he noted that "the book contains individuals, events, and times in a confusing manner."¹⁰ Additionally, it seems that regional and caste superiority sentiments are interwoven in his liberal-minded translation, particularly evident in the way he describes the "Boothathampi" matter, as observed by John H. Martyn.¹¹ John Martyn has extensively analyzed the various complexities in both the compilation of the "Yalpana Vaipava Malai" and Brito's translation in his book.

John Martyn mentions that the second edition of the "Yalpana Vaipava Malai" was published in 1882 by Reverend S. John of the American Mission in Jaffna. However, the book he published was actually titled "Yalpana Chariththiram or the History of Jaffna – S. John." This book was based on the "Yalpana Vaipava Malai" but included some modifications. Notably, there are differences in the accounts of Kailaya Vanniyan and his cousin Boothathampi traveling to Colombo and the events that took place there.

In another instance, Martyn clarifies that Brito did not write a separate "History of Jaffna." Instead, Brito translated the "Yalpana Vaipava Malai" and added some annotations. Martyn emphasizes that if Brito had indeed written a separate historical work, he would not have titled it "History of Jaffna."

10 Ibid - xxxiv

11 Martyn's Notes on Jaffna: Chronological, Historical, Biographical - John H. Martyn - Asian Educational Services, New Delhi, India - 1923

Another historically significant book translated by Brito is the "Mukkuvar Law," published in 1876, even before the "Yalpana Vaipava Malai." Brito undertook this translation while serving as Batticaloa's district judge, recognizing this work's importance. A reference indicates that he delivered a lecture titled "The Political Situation of Ceylon a Hundred Years Ago," which was later published as an article. However, the location or the text of this article remains unknown.¹²

Brito's deep involvement in scholarly activities is evident from his membership in the Royal Asiatic Society – Ceylon Branch (e.g., the 1865 membership list) and his collaboration on various research projects with several English scholars, including H.C.P. Bell.

Alongside the renowned archaeologist H.C.P. Bell, Brito submitted a research paper titled "The Tamilian Problem." It is noted that only after Brito did figures such as Ramanathan and Arunachalam begin to take part in the Royal Asiatic Society. Later, Brito, Ramanathan, and Arunachalam were active members simultaneously, participating in meetings and making significant decisions together. In a meeting held at the Colombo Museum on May 16, 1895, Ponnambalam Coomaraswamy chaired the session. In the same meeting, Ponnambalam Ramanathan expressed his views on a discussion about "Purananuru," while Brito discussed obtaining documents for debates on "Silappathikaram" and King Gajaba's Indian expedition.¹³

Additionally, Brito published a book titled "Life of Pope Pius IX – Jaffna" in 1892, as noted in the British Library's catalog of Tamil

12 "BOOKS ON CEYLON" - Ceylon Antiquary And Literary Register Vol.6 (1921-1922) by Office Of The Times Of Ceylon – 1921 (p.48)

13 JOURNAL, R.A.S. (CEYLON). [VOL. XIV. - 1897

books.¹⁴ The role of prominent Tamil Christian scholars of that era, such as Kasi Chetty, Henry Martyn, John, Daniel Samuel, and Christopher Brito, in rediscovering and disseminating the history of Jaffna cannot be overlooked. While their contributions may not have received due recognition within the Tamil community, they are highly acknowledged outside of it. Brito's contribution to Tamil cultural studies should be viewed in this broader context.

Kasi Chetty, Brito, and Muthukrishna were known as "Colombo Chetties"¹⁵ and, as noted by Patrick Peebles, they were Protestant migrants from South India.¹⁶ However, Peebles' book creates potential confusion by mentioning Christopher Brito, who translated the "Yalpana Vaipava Malai," in one paragraph and then discussing these Colombo Chetties in the next, implying that the two Britos might be the same person.

At the same time, there was another individual named Philip R. Britto Babapulle, a well-known physician and relative of Kasi Chetty, who also wrote books. There is even a street named "Dr Britto Babapulle Place" in Colombo's Grandpass area in his honor. He too came from a Chetty background.

14 A catalogue of the Tamil books in the library of the British museum, compiled by L. D. Barnett - 1909

15 We can see that the Chetties functioned as a separate caste in Sri Lanka. There are ample references to the existence of a dominant caste on a par with the Vellalars. The petition, dated 02.09.1830 dated Mariarasa of Jaffna, referred to the Supreme Court the evidence of the application filed by the Vellala Chetti caste against the permission of the Scheduled Castes to wear thodus (Vellala Caste and Chetty Caste against permitting the Low caste to wear ear rings) PRIMARY SOURCES FOR HISTORY OF THE SRI LANKAN TAMILS WORLD-WI DE SEARCH COMPILED BY DR. MURUGAN Gunasingam.

16 THE HISTORY OF SRI LANKA -Patrick Peebles - Greenwood Press - London (2006)

A CRITICAL HISTORY OF JAFFNA: THE TAMIL ERA

யாழ்ப்பாண
வைபவ விமர்சனம்:

தமிழரசர் உகம்

ஆங்கிலேயர்
தல்லூர், கவாமி ஞானப்பிரகாசர்

Aochuvely
The Gnanaprakasa Yantra Salai

1928

Historians such as K.M. de Silva and Howard Wriggins have recorded that even the maternal ancestors of J.R. Jayawardene belonged to the Colombo Chetty community.¹⁷ During the burning of the Jaffna Library by the United National Party government in 1981, the only surviving original copy of the "Yalpana Vaipava Malai" was destroyed, resulting in an irreplaceable loss.

The influence of the Mahavamsa's prestige should also be noted in the context of translating the "Yalpana Vaipava Malai" into English.

Challenge to the Mahavamsa

We know that scholarly research and intellectual endeavors in Sri Lanka were largely

17 People of Sri Lanka, "Sri Lankan" - Our Identity "Diversity" - Our Strength, Ministry of National Coexistence, Dialogue and Official Languages - 2017

conducted by colonialists during the colonial period. Their role in recovering our history was significant.

The Mahavamsa, which had been recognized as the history of Sri Lanka until then, was written in the 6th century. Historians have pointed out that it was authored in Pali by Mahānāma Thera and primarily depicted the history of the Sinhalese Buddhists. For centuries, those who attempted to study Sri Lankan history had no access to it in languages other than Pali. Efforts to translate it in the 19th century were not entirely successful. The first complete English translation was done by George Turnour, who was in the civil service in Sri Lanka, and it was published in 1837. However, it was criticized for its inaccuracies and incompleteness.

In this context, Brito brought out the English translation of the "Yalpana Vaipava Malai" in 1879. In a way, this served to challenge the Mahavamsa's narrative, which attempted to establish Sri Lankan history as predominantly Sinhalese. The translation highlighted details about Tamil kingdoms and Tamil kings in the North. The necessity of translating the Mahavamsa into English was then recognized not only by the Sinhalese but also by the English.

About 75 years after the flawed translation by George Turnour, Wilhelm Geiger published a German version. It was later translated back into English under the supervision of Mabel Haynes Bode, an expert in Pali, and was published in 1912.

Navalar's Choice: Ramanathan

At that time, Navalar was in conflict not only with Catholics but also with many Saivites.

Christopher Brito, a Catholic, had considerable influence within the Catholic community. Newspapers like "The Guardian" and "Ilankai nesan" supported Brito. "Udayabanu," another newspaper, was established later.

Bruto was wealthy, owning land in Kalpitiya, Chilaw, Madampe, and Negombo. During the cholera outbreak in Jaffna between 1878-1879, which claimed many lives, he collaborated with Arumuka Navalar in relief efforts. Navalar set up a porridge distribution project, collecting funds from many notable figures and providing porridge for several days. Navalar initially donated 20 rupees to start the fund. The daily expenses were around 22 to 25 rupees. Brito contributed 45 rupees to the project and personally visited the distribution sites every afternoon at 4 PM to collect details.

Bruto, along with local residents, Jaffna Government Agent W.C. Twynam, District Judge D. Saram, and Provincial Assistant C. Prime, established the Porridge Distribution Charity Society on August 2, 1877. Brito was appointed chairman, with Sesh Alagakone, Arumuka Navalar, Arunachalam Mudaliar, Sinnathambi, and Thambu as members. Twynam, Saram, and Prime served as advisors.¹⁸ Brito's contribution to creating a relief fund for the poor was appreciated by Twynam.¹⁹

In 1879, Brito also served as a member of the Colombo Municipal Council. Despite working with Brito, Navalar remained dissatisfied with him. The primary reason for this dissatisfaction was related to the Nallur Kandaswamy Temple case. In 1876, a

18 S. Dhananjayarajasingam "Navalar Works" (Tamil) - Colombo Tamil Sangam 2011

19 Founders of Modern Ceylon (Sri Lanka) EMINENT TAMILS - Vol I. Parts I & II - UMA SIVA PATHIPPAKAM - 1973

dispute between the temple's Brahmins and its administration escalated to a court case. Brito represented the administration as their lawyer, while Navalar supported the Brahmins. When Navalar entered the courtroom, Brito and other lawyers stood up to show respect. However, Navalar's resentment towards Brito stemmed from Brito's role as the opposing counsel in the case.²⁰

BrITO was a highly influential, educated, socially active, and politically experienced elder. However, Navalar brought the relatively unqualified Ramanathan into politics primarily because Ramanathan was a Saivite. Navalar could not tolerate the influence Brito, a Christian, had at the time.

On May 15, 1879, the Jaffna Bar Association held a meeting where lawyers gathered to collect signatures in support of Brito. Senior lawyers who supported Ramanathan did not attend this meeting, and Navalar's faction accused the Jaffna Bar Association of showing support for Brito.

In response, Navalar held a public meeting on May 22, 1879, at the Saiva Prakasa Vidyalaya in Vannarponnai. Nearly 3,500 people attended, marking the start of the campaign in support of Ramanathan. An article about this meeting appeared in the "Colombo Observer" newspaper on May 29, 1879. At this time, the "Colombo Observer" supported Ramanathan, while "The Examiner" supported Brito.²¹ Navalar's animosity towards "The Examiner" is evident in his writings, particularly in his book "Yalpanam Samaya Nilai," where he criticizes the newspaper's ongoing campaign against Saivites.

²⁰ Ibid - p-36

²¹ The life of Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan – by M. Vythilingam, B. A. – Vol -1 – 1971.

THE MUKKUV A LA W:

OR,

THE RULES OF SUCCESSION AMONG
THE MUKKUVARS OF CEYLON.

BY

C. BRITO,

ADVOCATE.

COLOMBO:
H. D. GABRIEL, BAILLIE STREET.
1876.

The meeting was chaired by Carol Viswanathapillai of Suthumalai, the first graduate of the University of Madras. In his speech, he expressed sorrow over the loss of Sir Muthucomaraswamy and proposed Ramanathan, a relative and a lawyer from Colombo, for the vacant position. He also highlighted the greatness of Ramanathan's family background.²²

This was seconded by D. Ponnambalam Pillai, who was a judge in Thanjavur. Everyone present accepted his statements unanimously. Navalar, who was suffering from asthma and

²² He was the first Asian to receive a "Sir". His father, Arumugampillai Coomaraswamy, was the first non-official Tamil representative in the First Legislative Council from 30 May 1835 to 1836. Arumugam Pillai acted as an interpreter for the British during the conquest and treaty of Kandy. Governor Robert Brownrigg has also gifted him a gold ring.

observing from a corner, suddenly became emotional and loudly instructed his assistant to bring his letters, documents, and cables.

Following this, Arumuga Navalar gave a speech, discussing Ponnambalam's family background and his contributions to the legal field. He stated, "After being elected to the Legislative Council, Sir Coomaraswamy did not return to Jaffna due to his work. Why shouldn't Ramanathan do the same? He is qualified for it." Many prominent figures then spoke in support of Ramanathan, including S. Thillaiyampalam (Udayar of Sandilipay), Kandhar Kasippillai (a merchant), S. D. Sivapragasam Pillai, E. Mayilvaganam, and S. Thurayappa Chettiar. At the meeting, many signed in support of Ramanathan. It was decided that the next campaign meetings would be held on the 24th in Chankanai and on the 27th in Nallur. Meetings from both sides took place in various locations.

During this period, there were no widespread elections or centralized voting. Instead, intellectuals and dignitaries would gather to express their opinions to the government. Ultimately, Ramanathan was successful. On August 27, 1879, at the age of 27, Ramanathan was appointed to the Legislative Council by the then-Governor, James Robert Longden.

Upon Ramanathan's appointment, Brito sent his complaint to the colonial secretary. In his letter dated June 18, 1879, Brito requested the cancellation of Ramanathan's appointment and urged respect for the people's decision. He detailed the nationwide meetings he had held and the support he had garnered, emphasizing that he had the backing of a majority of Tamils, Muslims, and Malays. However, the Governor declared Ramanathan's selection to be appropriate, and this response was communicated to Brito and his supporters.²³

23 Founders of Modern Ceylon (Sri Lanka) EMI-

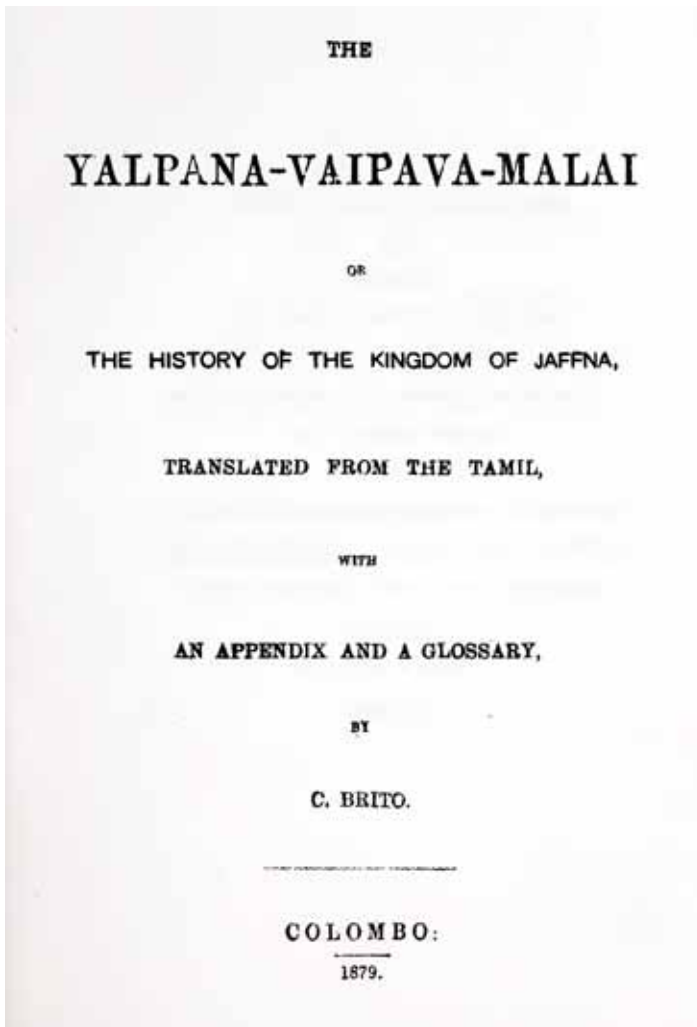
In the book "Founders of Modern Ceylon" by V. Muthucomaraswamy, there is a comprehensive essay about Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan. This essay includes various reports, newspaper articles, and meeting notes detailing the controversies surrounding Ramanathan's entry into politics. However, it appears that the book selectively compiles information favorable to Ramanathan while omitting details from Brito's side, which anyone can notice as a biased representation.

One particularly interesting section of the book mentions a statement published on May 15, 1879, in The Observer newspaper by the Nattukottai Chettiar community, supporting Ramanathan. The statement explains that the Nattukottai Chettiars held a meeting, collected signatures, and supported Ramanathan's appointment to Muthucomaraswamy's position, highlighting his origins, Coomaraswamy's contributions, and their family's heritage.

The irony here is noteworthy. In 1836, the Tamil representative in the Ceylon Legislative Council was Mudaliyar Arumugampillai Coomaraswamy, the first Tamil-Muslim representative. In 1830, Coomaraswamy was elected as the leader of the "non-Christian Tamils" in Colombo, an election held at the Upper Province Kachcheri.

Coomaraswamy's competitor was Tyagappa, a prominent figure in the alcohol production industry and a member of the Chettiar community. This election was essentially a peaceful conflict between the Saiva Vellalars and the Saiva Chettiars. There was a longstanding rivalry between the Chettiars and the Vellalars in Colombo. However, later on, the same Chettiar community fought

NENT TAMILS - Vol I. Parts I & II - UMA SIVA
PATHIPPAKAM - 1973



for the appointment of Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan, a Saiva Vellalar descendant of Mudaliyar Arumugampillai Coomaraswamy.

Ganapathy Pillai's Account

Half a century after Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan's appointment, an article was published in the "Eelakesari" on Navalar Memorial Day (December 15, 1946) that discussed this event. This article inspired me to write this piece. The article was authored by "C.K.," which likely refers to Pandithamani C. Ganapathy Pillai.

C. Ganapathy Pillai wrote another version of this incident in an essay titled "Navalar Ezhunthar" in the 10th annual Tamil literary textbook of Sri Lanka. He mentions:

"Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan was 25 years old at the time. He had a smiling face and a

golden complexion. He had just returned from studying in Madras. Although he was from Jaffna, the people of Jaffna knew nothing about him. He had recently arrived in Jaffna.

Brito was a famous and experienced lawyer. He was considered one of the top legal experts of the time. Everyone in Sri Lanka knew him. He had a significant reputation in both Colombo and Jaffna. It was customary to appoint him for major cases and appeals. He wielded considerable influence in Jaffna during those days..."

The article continues and, at one point, mentions the reason for the animosity between Navalar and Brito. During the Nallur Kandaswamy Temple case, Navalar supported the Brahmins, while Brito argued on behalf of the temple administration. Brito reportedly suggested to Navalar's associates that he could ensure the Brahmins' victory in exchange for Navalar's support in his own cases. Navalar viewed Brito's actions as lacking integrity and opposed him on these grounds.

C. Ganapathy Pillai presents this as a conjecture, using phrases like "it seems" to indicate that Brito may have mentioned this in some of his letters or cables. He writes:

"In the same letter, 'Navalar Ezhunthar,' he concludes with, 'One note: Those who told me this story a thousand times were eyewitnesses to the meeting and were involved with it. They included Navalar's nephew's son, those who wrote their history, and my teachers...'"

We must recognize that the Tamil-Saiva-Vellalar tradition, represented by Navalar, had the privilege of recording history. Therefore, it is essential to consider the possibility of bias in the accounts recorded by those who have written about these events.



Ramanathan and Brito as Relatives

Ramanathan and Brito were actually relatives, having married daughters of E. Nannithamby, a wealthy man from Manipay. Ponnambalam Ramanathan married Sellachi Ammal in 1874, and Brito married her sister Thangamma in 1866. This made Ramanathan and Brito closely related. Brito's son, C.M. Brito, later became a renowned Supreme Court lawyer, mentored by Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan.²⁴

Thirumeniyar Venkatasalapillai of Valvettithurai, who was Prabhakaran's great-grandfather, supported Brito's entry into politics. However, Arumuga Navalar, determined to bring a Saiva Vellalar into politics, used his full efforts to introduce Ramanathan instead. If this event had not occurred, the political history of Sri Lanka

²⁴ Arnold wright - Twentieth Century Impression of Ceylon – Lloyd's greater Britain publishing company limited (1907)

might have taken a different path.

Christians supported Brito, while Navalar rallied the Saivites behind Ponnambalam. Navalar promoted Ramanathan as someone deeply interested in Saivism, Tamil culture, and its heritage. Prominent figures like J.R. Arnold Sadasivam Pillai, Carol Vairamuthu, and Viswanathapillai²⁵ joined Navalar against Brito. According to D. Sabaratnam, this was the first instance of Tamils, especially in the North, actively participating in political activities.²⁶

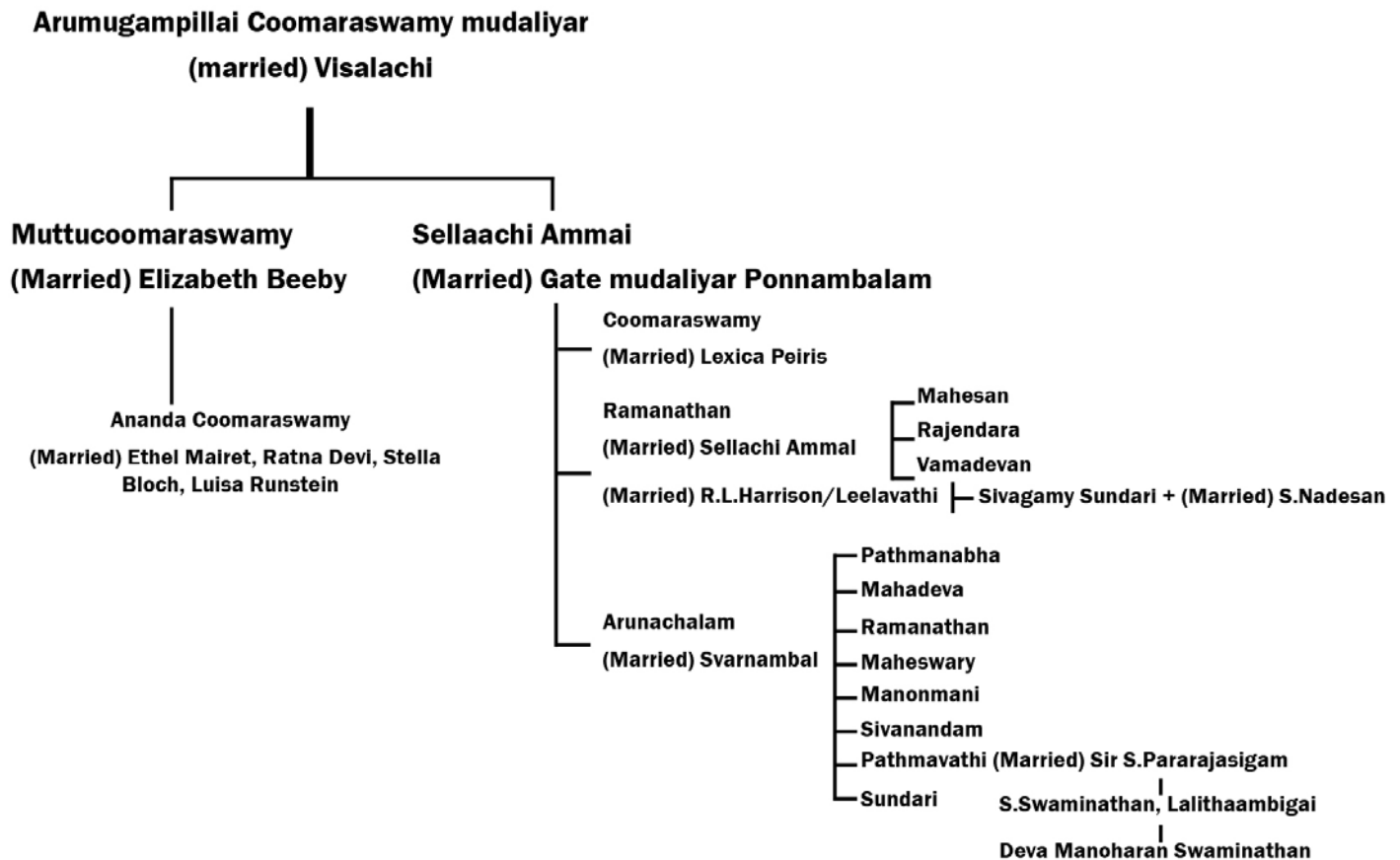
Navalar wrote to the British government, advocating for Tamil education in English while emphasizing the need to maintain their Hindu identity. Rajan Hoole notes that Navalar's objection was rooted in his opposition to lower castes studying alongside others, reflecting an inner sentiment to promote a Saiva Vellalar like Ramanathan in politics to exclude others.²⁷

Ramanathan carried forward Navalar's principles, acting as a devoted disciple. Later, during the Donoughmore Commission's visit, when the British proposed universal suffrage, Ramanathan opposed it. He was firmly against granting voting rights to women, lower castes, illiterate people, and the underprivileged. Similarly, he opposed a distinct identity

²⁵ Viswanatha Pillai: One of the first two to graduate from Madras University. The other is C.Y. Damodaram Pillai. Initially, he attended a Christian college and became a Christian and took the name Carol. Initially, he also argued against Navalar. Then he returned to Saivism and became a good friend of Navalar.

²⁶ "Sri Lanka Tamil Struggle" - Chapter 15: Tamils Demand Communal Representation by T. Sabaratnam, November 16, 2010

²⁷ "C. W. Thamothersampillai, Tamil Revivalist:" The Man Behind the Legend of Tamil Nationalism S. Ratnajeewan H. Hoole , An International Centre for Ethnic Studies Lecture November 17, 1997 - ICES Auditorium - Colombo



for Muslims, arguing that they should be represented under the Tamil identity without separate representation.

Professor K. Sivathamby notes an incident at Kopay Teacher Training College where teachers from the Pallars community were made to dine separately from higher caste teachers.²⁸ Rajan Hoole mentions that non-Vellalar students were not admitted to Navalar's Hindu College until the 1960s. Ramanathan's family had a history of political representation dating back to Mudaliyar Arumugathapillai Coomaraswamy, who was appointed the first Tamil-Muslim representative by the British government on October 30, 1830. Successive members of the Coomaraswamy family continued this political legacy, with Ramanathan serving in the

28 Sri Lankan Tamil society and politics / Karthigesu Sivathamby - Madras : New Century Book House, 1995

government for over half a century.

Christopher Brito, who made significant contributions to the revival of Tamil heritage in Sri Lanka, passed away on December 26, 1910, in Thiruvananthapuram.²⁹ His efforts were instrumental in the cultural renaissance among Tamils.

Navalar's racial, religious, and caste pride undoubtedly influenced his efforts to install Ramanathan in politics. However, Ramanathan did not grow into the leader Navalar and his followers had envisioned. Instead, he became a national leader for all of Sri Lanka, although Sinhalese nationalist forces continue to portray him as one of the founding fathers of Tamil nationalism.

29 Martyn's Notes on Jaffna: Chronological, Historical, Biographical - John H. Martyn - Asian Educational Services, New Delhi, India - 1923



The Meccan Shawl



Translated from the original Tamil short story *makkattuc cālvai* (மக்கத்துச் சால்வை) from the eponymous 1992 collection of short stories by **S.L.M. Hanifa**

Translated by:
Eluttukkinīyavan
(எழுத்துக்கினியவன்)

“Thambi! Mammanifā, do you remember me, son? That day, your wāppā and everyone else remained mum. You were a little boy. But you spotted it like a vigilant crow. You shouted as if you were raise the alarm.”

“He is hit, he is hit, Anṇāviyār is hit on the head!”

“Only you saw the hit, son. Even today, your shout keeps resonating in my ears.”

The fight happened so long ago. But it is still fresh in my heart, as if it happened just yesterday ...

In those days, the fragrance of the impending Haj celebration would start wafting in the air three or four days prior to the holy day itself.

On the eve of the Haj, Paiyennā “hotel” was abuzz with activity. The two showcases sparkled; the delicacies arranged within them twinkled. The fragrance of the muscat, lovingly matured in cow ghee by Paiyennā’s hand, was irresistible. A piece cost twenty cents. A cup of tea was ten cents.

The tea made by Paiyennā’s hand using “Nona brand” condensed milk had its own unique deliciousness. It was magical how the touch of his hand blending the condensed milk and the tightly infused tea water elevated the taste.

On exiting the “hotel” after a bite of the muscat and a sip of tea, one noticed the flyer, stuck to the portia tree which was like a natural air conditioner for the hotel.

To mark the Haj, there was going to be a grand martial arts competition following the Asr evening prayers at the mosque. Challengers were invited to fight Nūhuththambi, renowned teacher of cheenadi—the stick-based martial art in Eastern Sri Lanka inspired by ancient Shaolin monks. The victor would be rewarded with a Meccan Shawl and an entire cluster of parangi plantains.

The holy day celebrations that year had been grand. The sun had reached its peak overhead and had started on its lopsided descent towards Uppāru. Multitudes from the neighboring villages swarmed towards the village marketplace.

We, the village tots, crouched down on our haunches, squeezing between the legs of adults in the front row.

The village headman and the mattichem trustees from the mosque were managing the crowd. Time crawled. The challenger annāviyār and his disciples were getting restless. Teacher Nūhuththambi who had issued the challenge was nowhere to be seen. Everyone kept looking at the riverside road. Sarcastic talk and putdowns started raising their heads. At a distance, a bicycle was hurtling fast towards the market.

“Here he is! Hoyrā...!”

A roar went through the crowd instantly rekindling the buzz.

It was indeed Nūhuththambi. He hopped off the bicycle seemingly without slowing down, handing the bicycle over to someone else. The next instant, he leapt to the center of the street where the challenge fight was to take place.

He had a physique like an ebony tree. The years of casting fishnets had reinforced his arms and legs. He looked like a bull that could not be tamed.

Once again, applause and whistles rose up from the crowd. He removed the Indian ‘pazhaiyagād’ sarong he was wearing. The sarong flew from his hand over to the portia tree and stuck to it. Inside he was wearing the siruvāl underwear covering his thighs down to his knees, and a sleeved undershirt.

From his buffed chest, two long arms emerged like fine swords. Rooted to the same spot, he swirled his hands bent down suddenly—having first leapt into the air—to kiss the ground, seeking permission and the traditional



ritual salām varisai salute of cheenadi practitioners. The crowd went into an ecstatic roar and calmed down.

The village headman made the formal announcement: “Anyone who wants to challenge Nūhuththambi, come forward!”

A figure emerged at the far end of the teeming crowd. It swirled and twirled, moving through the lightning streaks traced by the rapid movements of the pole, made of wood from a kalviṇṇāṅku tree, held in its hands. The kalviṇṇāṅku pole whooshed with a high-pitched howl.

In their excitement, the spectators’ feet barely

held on to the ground below them. The hands and feet of those who knew how to play cheenadi were itching to get into the arena.

“The winner of this game will be given a cluster of plantains as the prize and will be honored by the draping of a Meccan shawl.”

The village headman’s announcement elicited thundering applause.

Ahmadlebbe Aṇṇāviyār stood on one side, Teacher Nūhuththambi on the other. Each unique in his own ways. A peerless pair.

First, they stood facing each other, sixteen cubits apart. The headman yelled, “Start!” The

next instant, both kicked up dust storms as they took their salām varisai.

They swirled like whirlpools—leaping into midair—as four arms sliced the air like lightning.... people’s eyes only saw two amorphous figures spinning like tops.

Having taken their salām varisai, they retreated to their corners and stood there.

Weligāmam Maulana Wāppā was Ahmadlebbe Aṇṇāviyār’s guru. Wāppā’s son took the cheenadi stick blessed by Maulana Wāppā and handed it to the Aṇṇāviyār who grabbed onto it respectfully.

The stick stood between the fingers in his hands and danced with a high-pitched drone. The one stick became four, and then sixteen, and exploded into many more, weaving a magic trick for the watching eyes.

On the opposite side, Teacher Nūhuththambi stood holding the cheenadi stick blessed by his guru, the Indian nānā.

It was a bamboo cane with silver rings at either end. He lifted it with his right hand and swirled it.

His left hand remained motionless while the right hand twisted and turned. That was a skill and facility that only he excelled in. Like a silver bird flying with its entourage, weaving up and down in pitch-perfect formation before disappearing into the horizon, the silver-ringed cane in Nūhuththambi’s hands just flew hither and thither.

The first round was over and the second began. The two crows glared intently at each other through their fighting sticks and snarled. They chased each other around ... they each invited the other to battle, again and again,

.... They circled each other, wearing out the opponent, and then suddenly leapt like lightning... grappling with each other...

The dust storm that rose from the ground was a sight to behold!

Out of nowhere, Nūhuththambi’s silver pigeon leapt up to lightly graze Ahmadlebbe Aṇṇāviyār’s shoulder in a flash and returned. Aṇṇāviyār, momentarily shaken, steadied himself by planting his feet firmly on the ground.

“He is hit, he is hit, Aṇṇāviyār is hit on the head!” Mammali and I screamed at the top of our voices. In the village, we had, in fact, earned a reputation for being little rascals.

“Dēy! Shut up. Who do you think you are talking to!” Eerānkutti, one of Aṇṇāviyār’s disciples hissed with rage.

“Not hit, not hit... yeah, right, only these misbegotten tots managed to see what all these important people couldn’t see!”

Village headman Buhāri, who was refereeing the fight, did not see what actually happened because he was momentarily distracted. The restless crowd clamored. Aṇṇāvi Ahmadlebbe’s disciples encircled the ring, grinding their teeth.

They were literally shaking, looking as if they wanted to jump on Teacher Nūhuththambi and shred him to pieces.

“Dēy! You think our man can be hit? Bring it on!” each swirled his fighting stick, seething with rage.

Teacher Nūhuththambi stood alone aghast, his hand covering his mouth. Calming Aṇṇāvi Ahmadlebbe’s disciples down was a herculean

task for the village mosque's mattichem trustees.

“Dēy! Shut up, all of you,” the headman yelled in a commanding voice, cane in hand. The crowd calmed down like an obedient kitten.

“Let us resume the fight.”

eyes. As if he was possessed, he picked up his silver-ringed cane in a frenzy. The fight resumed. Everyone's eyes were fixated on the cane.. and the stick.

As the game proceeded, Nūhuththambi felt as if a fiery pearl flew through the air and struck him in the eyes. His eyes burnt. He lifted a hand towards his eyes. Just at that moment, the serpent thrown by Aṇṇāviyār bit his



The village headman decided.

“What! Resume the fight? You must be kidding!” Teacher Nūhuththambi was adamant.

“We didn't see you hit him...” the bulk of the crowd retorted.

Outrage surged within Nūhuththambi's heart.

“Not only did they rob me of my victory, but they have also resorted to abuse me for my fisherfolk caste.” Tears welled up in his

shoulder and retreated.

“He is hit, he is hit... Aṇṇāviyār has won.”

They lifted Aṇṇāviyār up in the air. The headman and the mattichem trustees draped the Meccan shawl over his shoulder. Paiyennā took the cluster of paṇangi plantains hanging in his eatery and handed it to Aṇṇāviyār.

They took him in a procession as the salawat prayer praising the prophet, blending with the ululations of the women, reached sky high.



“Thambi, a penny for your thoughts?”

His voice broke my reverie and brought me back from bygone memories to the present.

“I remember very well. Very well, indeed. What happened to you that day was injustice,” I said calmly.

“That day, I left behind this soil and my kith and kin. Now, I have returned after thirty years, and I am glad to see that you have grown into an important man in the village.”

His eyes became moist.

“Mammanifā, two of my kids are attending university in Colombo. My eldest went abroad

to work and has returned with two outboard motors to go deep-sea fishing. Now people respect us as somebody. On that day, we didn’t get justice because we are fisherfolk. Today one of ours has become the leader of the village and of Allah’s school. Our rotting fish goes for a hundred rupees per kilo, son. It has become five times more expensive than rice.”

In his heart, the swirl that started all those years ago had grown into a roaring tsunami.

“What should we do now?”

“I want justice. I want a rematch with Ahmadlebbe Aṇṇāviyār. I want to be draped in a Meccan Shawl!” He spoke with passion.

This man has such a desire after all these years? Perhaps he is a little demented?

My heart was anguished.

“Why the hesitation? I will stay the night at my elder sister’s place. I will return after the early morning subhu prayers. Tell me your decision.”

He stroked his silvery beard that hung from his chin like cotton wool and quickly ran down the steps.

“Anybody home?” I called out.

“Come in, come in, thambi!”

Ahmadlebbe Aṇṇāviyār’s wife herself welcomed me.

“Where is Aṇṇāviyār?”

“He has gone to oversee the paddy fields in Padukādu. He should be returning any minute now,” she started moving slowly towards the kitchen ...

A teapot climbed up on the clay stove. Even after fifty, her beauty was intact. All her teeth were like white pearls. There was an occasional gray streak in her hair.

“What is it thambi, you have come here after a long time?”

“I want to see Aṇṇāvi chāchā.” Even before I could finish, a bicycle peeked through the front entrance. Our ensuing conversation meandered all over the place and finally arrived at Teacher Nūhuththambi.

“Chāchā, it happened thirty years ago. But it is still fresh in my heart ...”

“Yes, son! That day, it was he who ...”

Aṇṇāvi held himself back. His face reflected the rush of emotions. It was as if the Meccan shawl on his shoulder suddenly became unbearably heavy...

“A rematch? Why not,” he said distractedly, his thoughts dwelling on something.

“What? A cheenadi fight? These old men, at their age?” Chāchi mocked.

It was a Jummah day.

After the Asr prayers, people emerged from the mosque, having forgotten their fears and worries ...

Paiyennā hotel lay in ruins—the market stalls had been long abandoned—its padlock lay rusting.

The crowds jostled as if it was a funeral.

The two seventy-year-old young men stood in the ring...

Ahmadlebbe Aṇṇāviyār tied a rubber band to the temples of his eyeglasses and tied it behind the back of his head. His eyesight had deteriorated after he hit his forties.

None of the mosque mattichem trustees from that day were alive any longer. All of them had been reunited with the soil. New blood was administering the village now.

“Begin!”

The fight started, commanded by the new village headman. Aṇṇāviyār held the same kalviṇṇāṅku-pole; its oils had dried out but still emitted the same low-pitch drone and swayed like a cobra. He squatted, straightened up and whirled, jumping into the air, and bent down again in one smooth motion to touch the

soil and kiss it.

Nūhuththambi mastān had the same silver-rimmed bamboo cane. It took wings in his hand, flew around and cackled. His one-handed swirling made the bamboo cane produce an ethereal hum.

The two seventy-year-old crows swam, dived, and resurfaced. Their chests swelled up and subsided.

The fight resumed.

Nūhuththambi mastān brimmed with the thirst for revenge as he swirled like fire.

Ahmadlebbe Aṇṇāviyār stood calmly looking for an opportunity to trap his opponent. He had been parrying every blow of the bamboo cane deftly and cleverly when it happened.

Ahmadlebbe Aṇṇāviyār's eyeglasses came loose, flew to the other side of road and shattered. At that very instant, Nūhuththambi's white dove went right next to Aṇṇāviyār's shoulder ...

If the white dove had wanted, it could have pecked at the shoulder. It hesitated just for a moment, and retreated ...

Aṇṇāviyār saw hundreds of white doves, making him gasp.

Nūhuththambi mastān slowed down. As the bamboo bird in his hand flew in circles, the train of his thoughts pleaded plaintively at him.

'His eyesight is hazy. It is not fair for me to fight him. Even at this age, Allah has blessed me with strength and light in my eyes. That is the greatest prize.' his conscience delivered its judgment.

The next instant, the silver-ringed bamboo dove flew away from his hands as he leapt towards Ahmadlebbe Aṇṇāviyār and embraced him to begin a musaba, the formal two-handed handshake.

Ahmadlebbe Aṇṇāviyār, too, cast away his kalviṇṇāṅku-tree pole.

The two crows embraced each other, did musaba, and kissed ...

The spectators had goosebumps and tears in their eyes.

Aṇṇāviyār extricated himself from mastān's embrace and appeared to be getting ready to say something. The crowd quietened down expectantly.

"Assalāmu alaikum! It was Nūhuththambi who won the fight thirty years ago. My empty vanity did not allow me to acknowledge that victory. He was the victor then and he is, now." He respectfully removed the Meccan shawl which was tied around his hips. The same shawl that the crowd had draped on his shoulders to honor him for the fight thirty years ago. He brought its two edges together and flapped it vigorously, and in one deft motion, draped it around Nūhuththambi mastān's shoulders. Tears of joy trickled down from his eyes, relieved at discarding the guilt that weighed on him all these years, and from the satisfaction of having bestowed the honor of the Meccan shawl upon its rightful recipient.

The salawat prayers praising the greatness of the prophet reached sky high. The portia tree smiled with joy. The fragrance of the attar wafting from the Meccan shawl draped around Nūhuththambi mastān's shoulders filled the air.

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