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Revolution:
AKD Led with
Ballots, Not Bullets**

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Steering the Nation Forward: An Era of Responsibility Begins!



On behalf of Jaffna Monitor, we congratulate Anura Kumara Dissanayake on his historic election as the President of Sri Lanka. His ascension to the highest office represents a monumental shift, marking a rare departure from the entrenched power structures that have long dominated the political landscape.

For the first time in recent memory, the insidious rhetoric of racial and religious divisiveness did not dominate the Sinhala-majority candidates' campaigns. Even fringe elements, historically prone to inflaming sectarian tensions, refrained from exploiting such incendiary tactics.

However, it is disheartening to observe that while Sinhala political discourse has matured beyond ethnic fault lines, segments of Tamil political rhetoric have regressed into Tamil racism. A faction of diaspora-funded troublemakers, masquerading as champions of community interests, rallied behind the 'Tamil candidate' and openly espoused the notion that Tamils must exclusively vote for Tamil candidates. Worse still, they promulgated a dangerous narrative that "authentic" Tamils, born of both Tamil parents, should vote for Tamil representatives. This ethnocentric myopia is not only divisive but a pernicious form of the very racism they claim to abhor.

The hypocrisy of such posturing is deeply troubling. Those who have historically condemned Sinhala racism must themselves be held to account when they incite Tamil chauvinism for electoral gain. While the majority of the Tamil electorate repudiated these divisive tactics, over 225,000 votes garnered through this regressive rhetoric warrant serious introspection within Tamil society.

Tamils must recognize the dangers of this form of political regression. Resorting to ethnic chauvinism in any guise is a

retrograde step for our political culture. Our focus must remain on nurturing a future where leaders are elected for their merit, vision, and moral integrity—not their ethnic identity. While it is heartening that the majority of Tamil voters rejected this brand of politics, the persistence of such rhetoric among some remains a red flag. As a society, we must remain vigilant in ensuring that we continue on the path of unity and inclusivity.

Anura Kumara Disanayake's victory is noteworthy not just for what it symbolizes but for what it pragmatically represents. He did not achieve the 50% threshold needed for a sweeping mandate, a reality he candidly acknowledged in his inaugural address. His understanding of the weighty responsibility ahead was palpable, as he emphatically declared, "I will be the president for all." His emphasis on unity and reconciliation will be the cornerstone of his tenure as he seeks to govern beyond the narrow confines of electoral allegiances.

In his speech, the president also underscored a fundamental truth about democracy. "The most basic element of democracy is the election of leaders by the people. But democracy is more than just voting; it is about the perpetual safeguarding of institutions, the rule of law, and transparency." His words resonate with the urgency of the hour. Sri Lanka's democratic institutions have been battered by corruption, erosion of public trust, and a growing perception of political impunity. Rebuilding this trust is not merely a task—it is the mandate of his presidency.

The new president has inherited a country at a crossroads—politically disillusioned and economically beleaguered. Yet, in a moment of profound candour, he remarked, "I am not a magician," acknowledging the inherent

limitations of one leader in addressing the multifaceted crises facing the nation. Instead, he envisions a collective effort, inviting professionals, intellectuals, and citizens from all walks of life to contribute to the arduous task of nation-building.

Anura Kumara's personal journey from humble beginnings as a child selling cigarettes on trains to the presidency of Sri Lanka is an inspirational testament to the possibilities that still exist in our country. His rise exemplifies the aspirations of a generation that believes in meritocracy, hard work, and the possibility of overcoming adversity.

As he embarks on this critical tenure, Anura Kumara must remain mindful of the immense expectations that accompany him. He takes office at a time of national reckoning, where the decisions made in the coming months will chart the course for the nation's future. The road ahead is fraught with challenges, but with the right combination of humility, strength, and collaborative spirit, he has the opportunity to recalibrate Sri Lanka's political and economic trajectory.

While this election may not have granted the new president an unequivocal mandate, it has provided him with something far more crucial—a mandate for change. It is now incumbent upon him to honor that trust, to serve all Sri Lankans, and to rebuild a nation yearning for renewal.

Warm regards,

கணியன் பூங்குன்றன்
Kaniyan Pungundran
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JVP's Third Revolution: AKD Led with Ballots, Not Bullets



BY:

Kaniyan Pungundran

கணியன் பூங்குன்றன்

Upali Mama, a former Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) militant whose revolutionary dreams were once steeped in blood, now lives a peaceful life with his wife and three children. His violent past, once driven by Marxist-Leninist ideology, has long been buried. Yet, the wounds of that era remain deeply etched in his soul. His brother and two other close relatives were among the countless lives claimed by the brutal actions of the Sri Lankan security forces, just as many intellectuals and innocent people were victims of JVP militants during the insurrection. These scars linger, both in Upali Mama and in the hearts of those affected by the violence from both sides—JVP and security forces alike—leaving pain that no passage of time can fully heal.

For Upali Mama, last week seemed like a chapter from a fairy tale—pulled straight out

of a dream, or perhaps, a strange twist of fate. He showed this correspondent a Sinhala-language newspaper. On the front page was a picture of Anura Kumara Dissanayake—the current leader of the JVP, a man who had once walked a similar path of rebellion—standing tall, taking the oath of office as the new President of Sri Lanka. Behind him, in full military regalia, stood the imposing chiefs of the tri-forces, all standing respectfully.

Upali Mama looked at the picture. With a quiet sigh, he turned to this correspondent and said, "Even in my wildest dreams, I never imagined this. One of our comrades, once hunted like animals, is now the Executive President of Sri Lanka, giving orders to the very forces that hunted us. And those forces, who killed our brothers, are now standing at attention, ready to follow his every word."

While Upali Mama could never have envisioned this day, it is highly doubtful that Anura Kumara Dissanayake—the newly sworn-in 9th Executive President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka—had envisioned it either, back when he was



an underground JVP activist. In 1992, he couldn't even attend his father's funeral, as police and troops were waiting at his home, ready to arrest him. The idea would have seemed even more improbable when his Loku Mama (Father's elder brother)—a fellow JVP activist with whom Anura shared a close political and emotional bond—was killed by Sri Lankan security forces.

Dissanayake Mudiyanseelage Anura Kumara Dissanayake was born on November 24, 1968, in Galewela, located in the Matale District of the Central Province. Though it is a Sinhala-majority area, a significant number of Tamils and Muslims also live there. When he was still a child, his family moved to the rural village of Thambuthegama, nestled in the Anuradhapura District, a region deeply rooted in Sinhala heritage. Anura Kumara, the son of a humble farmer, was just two and a half years old when the JVP, a Marxist-Leninist revolutionary movement led by the fiery Rohana Wijeweera, launched its first insurrection in 1971. This bold yet ill-fated rebellion against the Sri Lankan government, quietly supported by a few communist



nations, including North Korea, would later shape the political landscape Anura would come to navigate.

By the time the JVP's second violent uprising erupted in April 1987, Anura Kumara was no longer the quiet village boy. He had already achieved a significant milestone by then—becoming the first student from Thambuthegama Central College to gain university entrance. He earned his place at the prestigious University of Peradeniya, a rare accomplishment for someone from such a modest background. It was during this time that Anura's political activism ignited. Aligned with the JVP's ideology, he quickly became a fiercely active student activist, deeply embedded in the political turbulence that swept the country.

Sources close to him say that Anura's involvement with the JVP began early in his school days when, like many other teenagers and youth, the seeds of rebellion were sown in his mind. Officially joining the JVP in 1987—the same year the JVP launched its violent

campaign against the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord—Anura threw himself into full-time political activities. It was a dangerous time, one where survival often meant going underground to evade the brutal crackdowns by government forces.

When the security forces tightened their grip, Anura was forced to hide in his professor's house for months, narrowly escaping arrest and potential death. Later, in 1992, after the dust of the insurrection had somewhat settled, Anura transferred to the University of Kelaniya, where he completed his studies, graduating in 1995 with a degree in physics.

He was born a bright student," a former roommate of Anura Kumara Dissanayake from the University of Kelaniya told Jaffna Monitor. "We rarely saw him studying, yet somehow, he always ended up as one of the top scorers in exams." He elaborated further, sharing how Anura's late-night habits were something of a mystery to his peers. "Anura would often jump out of our hostel room late at night and wouldn't return until the early hours of the



morning, only to sleep through most of the day, skipping lectures altogether. At the time, we had no idea what he was up to."

The roommate speculated that Anura was likely engaged in covert work during those late hours, possibly conducting secret education classes for JVP members or campaigning in villages about the party's policies. "We hardly ever saw him with books," he added, "but when exam time came, he would perform exceptionally well. It left us wondering if he was sneaking off in the night to study somewhere. It was as if he had some secret method.

Anura Kumara's teachers recall him as an academically gifted student, describing him as "educationally blessed." However, that blessing didn't seem to extend to his early life. Born to a minor employee of the Surveyor General's Department who also engaged in farming and a homemaker mother, Anura's childhood was marked by hardship and relentless work. Despite his brilliance, he had to juggle multiple responsibilities. He tutored younger students in mathematics in his village and sold cigarettes and biscuits on trains after school

to help support his family. In an interview, he reflected on those challenging times, admitting, "Whenever my teachers appeared on the train, I would hurriedly hide my goods in embarrassment.

Trailblazer

The post-independence history of Sri Lanka's politics has largely been confined to a few elite, English-speaking families. Anura Kumara Disanayake is only the second president in Sri Lanka's history to emerge from outside this traditional, English-educated political elite that has long held the reins of power. The first exception to this elite lineage was Ranasinghe Premadasa, the third executive president. In a cruel twist of history, Premadasa, once a man of the people, played a pivotal role in the brutal suppression of the JVP's second insurrection, overseeing the deaths of thousands of Sinhala youths.

However, some critics argue that while Ranasinghe Premadasa did come from outside the political aristocracy, he cannot truly be considered an outsider. By the time



he became president, he had already served as prime minister for 11 years and had, by then, experienced the trappings of power and privilege. In that sense, they contend, Premadasa did not step into the presidency as a complete outsider but rather as someone who had already tasted power.

By contrast, they argued Anura Kumara Disanayake's rise to the presidency represents a truer break from the elite, marking him as the only leader to fully challenge the deeply entrenched power structure from a grassroots background. For many, Anura Kumara Disanayake's election represents a monumental shift away from the dominance of Sri Lanka's traditional political elite—a group whose tight grip on power has coincided with years of economic hardship and growing public disillusionment.

In the recently concluded presidential election, Anura Kumara Disanayake secured an impressive 5.6 million votes, with large segments of his support coming from youth and first-time voters, drawn to his message of reform and renewal. This surge in support marks a dramatic shift from his performance in the 2019 presidential election, where he garnered only 418,553 votes, dwarfed

by Gotabaya Rajapaksa's commanding 6.9 million.

Even more striking is that a significant portion of the 6.9 million voters who once backed Gotabaya—who openly attributed his victory to the overwhelming support of the Sinhala electorate—shifted their allegiance to Anura Kumara this time. How did an electorate that overwhelmingly voted for a Sinhala nationalist strongman suddenly embrace a Marxist-Leninist candidate? The answer lies in the JVP's astute, evolving strategy, which tapped into the frustrations and aspirations of a disillusioned populace hungry for change.

A full-time JVP worker, speaking to Jaffna Monitor, explained that the victory wasn't about the triumph of Marxist-Leninist ideology. "Let's be honest, people didn't vote for our ideology," he said with a chuckle, even questioning whether most voters could spell Marxist-Leninist. The real driving force behind the JVP's success, he emphasized, was the people's thirst for change—change from rampant corruption and a break from the stagnant politics that have gripped Sri Lanka since independence.

Anura Kumara Disanayake and the JVP

leadership are acutely aware of this reality. Many of those who voted for them this time had previously backed Gotabaya Rajapaksa, not because they suddenly embraced leftist ideology, but because they were desperate for something different. "Claiming this as a victory for Marxism-Leninism is irrelevant," he added. This is precisely why none of the JVP leaders, including Dissanayake, framed the win as an ideological triumph. Instead, they understood it as a mandate for change, a response to the people's plea for a new path forward.

Another JVP activist candidly told Jaffna Monitor, "We know the vote wasn't just for the JVP. "If Anura had run solely on the JVP ticket, his chances would have been slim." He pointed out that the older generation still carries the painful memories of the JVP's violent insurrection from 1988 to 1989. "Those dark days are hard to forget," he admitted.

"But we played it smart," he added, explaining how the JVP's success in this election hinged on forming the National People's Power (NPP) alliance. This strategic move allowed the party to distance itself from its troubled past and project a fresh, inclusive image.

"We created the NPP coalition with like-minded individuals," a JVP leader elaborated.

"These were intellectuals, professionals, patriots, and people fed up with racism and corruption—citizens who were completely disillusioned with the current political system but genuinely wanted to help build a better nation. Many of them wouldn't have joined us if we'd approached them under the JVP banner, but when we broadened our scope and formed the NPP in 2019, they were more than willing to align with us."

Another JVP insider acknowledged that some potential allies were hesitant to join the JVP due to its violent past, while others were wary of the party's strict internal rules, such as bans on smoking and drinking. "Some didn't want to be restricted by those kinds of regulations," he admitted. "But by forming the NPP, we found common ground. We gave them a platform to work with us for the greater good without forcing them to fully conform to the JVP's rigid structure."

The NPP is an amalgamation of 21 groups, including political parties, youth organizations, women's groups, trade unions, and civil society organizations," he explained. "It gave us the flexibility to bring together people who shared our vision for a just and inclusive Sri Lanka, even if they didn't fit into the traditional JVP mould." He admitted that the JVP wouldn't





have made it this far had it strictly adhered to Marxist-Leninist ideology. "This open-minded approach is what attracted intellectuals like Dr. Harini Amarasuriya to join us through the NPP's National Intellectuals Organization.

"We made sure to treat them well," he continued. "In the last parliamentary election, we had just two elected representatives: Anura Kumara Dissanayake from Colombo and Vijitha Herath from Gampaha. We also secured a national list seat, which we gave to Dr. Harini Amarasuriya. Not only was she not part of the JVP, but she identifies more as a liberal than as a Marxist-Leninist. When Anura became president, he appointed her as prime minister. Both times, we could have easily chosen someone from our own ranks, but we didn't. We recognized the importance of honoring the broader spirit of the NPP," a JVP source shared.

This move, he explained, allowed the party to reach beyond its traditional base and attract a more diverse, hopeful electorate. Many voters, who might have been hesitant to support a strictly Marxist-Leninist platform, found reassurance in the NPP's inclusive

and pragmatic approach. "By showing that we're not just about ideology but about real, inclusive leadership, we were able to create a platform for change that resonated with a much wider audience," he emphasized.

Though the JVP has rebranded itself through the NPP, downplaying its Marxist-Leninist ideology in public, its real strength lies in the dedication of its full-time workers—an army of committed individuals who have sacrificed jobs, comforts, and personal lives in service to the party's core ideals. "They've given up everything for Marxist-Leninist principles," said a JVP leader who preferred to remain anonymous. "For them, ideology comes above all else. These workers are our greatest asset."

He further explained that the party's enduring success is deeply rooted in this unwavering ideological commitment. "You can't expect people to dedicate their lives, asking for nothing in return, unless they're driven by something bigger than themselves. These workers believe in Marxist-Leninist ideals, and that belief is what powers our movement," he emphasized.

He explained that while the JVP has left its militant past behind, its organizational structure remains as disciplined and efficient as ever. "It's no longer about violence, but our structure is still as sharp and organized as an efficient militant group," he remarked. The party now operates like a well-oiled machine, with full-time workers moving largely under the radar. "They don't flaunt their affiliations; instead, they quietly work at the grassroots level, building our foundation from the bottom up."

The leader emphasized the secretive, low-profile nature of this network, noting, "You won't see them boasting about their involvement, but they are everywhere, making



things happen." He pointed out that the devotion of these individuals is unparalleled in Sri Lankan politics. "Show me another political party with workers who give so much, expecting nothing in return," he challenged.

This silent, relentless commitment, he believes, is the JVP's most powerful asset, and it has seamlessly translated into the NPP's growing strength. While the NPP presents itself as a modern, broad-based political movement, the heart of its success beats with the unwavering dedication of these full-time Marxist-Leninist workers. "Their behind-the-scenes efforts have quietly but decisively built the foundation for the NPP's rise," he added.

A political observer, speaking with Jaffna Monitor, noted that in most elections, the main opposition party typically capitalizes on the anti-incumbency factor to gain an advantage. However, the NPP took a different

approach this time, launching a bold campaign that held every party since independence accountable for Sri Lanka's troubles. This strategy not only targeted the ruling party but also placed the main opposition, the SJB, and then-President and presidential candidate Ranil Wickremesinghe in an uncomfortable position.

The two defining and well-crafted slogans of the campaign—"Everyone is a thief" ("Okama Horu") and "The country belongs to Anura" ("Ratta Anurata")—resonated strongly with over 5.6 million voters, who embraced these messages as undeniable truths. Even more remarkable, the observer added, was the manner in which the victory was received. Rather than loud ceremonies, flashy parades, or grand celebrations, the people who propelled this win welcomed it with calm and self-discipline.

"More than just ideology and strategy, it was Anura Kumara Disanayake's (AKD) personal brand that also fueled his rise to power," a political commentator told Jaffna Monitor. Over the past decade, AKD systematically built his reputation as a clean politician with zero tolerance for corruption. His personal brand of incorruptibility resonated deeply with voters, particularly the younger generation, who had grown disillusioned by decades of political graft and mismanagement.

Since taking over the JVP leadership ten years ago, AKD had made it his mission to distance the party from its past as a radical Marxist militant group. In an unprecedented move, he even publicly issued an apology for the first time in the party's history, acknowledging the JVP's responsibility for over 6,000 deaths during the 1988–89 insurrection. It was a bold gesture aimed at turning a new page, but insiders say it didn't sit well with the JVP's Politburo. Faced with internal pushback, AKD subtly shifted his tone, opting to express "regret" instead in subsequent public statements.

Anura Kumara Disanayake's swearing-in ceremony reflected the understated tone his leadership promised, a political observer told Jaffna Monitor. 'It was as unassuming as a routine administrative oath-taking,' he remarked. 'We didn't just talk about "system change"; we embodied it, starting from the very moment AKD took office. The ceremony itself was marked by simplicity—attendees, including foreign dignitaries, were provided nothing more than basic water bottles. There were no grand rallies, no lavish celebrations. Our jubilant members paused only briefly to acknowledge the moment before returning to their work—just as our new president did,' a JVP leader proudly recounted to Jaffna Monitor.

The next two to three years are poised to be a transformative period for Sri Lanka as it embarks on a new political path, a political observer told Jaffna Monitor. "This journey is unlikely to be smooth. We can expect intense clashes between those pushing for change and those clinging to the status quo, as well as fierce battles between left-wing and right-wing factions," he remarked.

For years, the JVP—and later, its alliance, the NPP—was largely seen as a force of resistance, a protest-driven movement. "They've got the cadres, the machinery, and the ability to mobilize mass protests in mere hours. But now, the tables have turned. In power, they'll have to grapple with the gritty realities of governance," he added.

A significant hurdle looming on the horizon will be managing tensions with former allies like the Frontline Socialist Party (FSP) and the Inter-University Students' Federation (IUSF), not to mention contending with right-wing parties and associations. What was once a coalition of the discontented may soon find itself fracturing under the weight of power.

Reflecting on the broader political landscape, a seasoned observer likened the seismic shift of 2024, marked by Anura Kumara Disanayake's ascent to power, to the unexpected rise of the Aam Aadmi Party in Delhi in 2013. "This new wave," he noted, "holds the potential to unlock doors long barred to ordinary citizens, especially within the corridors of Colombo's power structure. If the NPP can deliver on their promises, they might well usher in an era of prosperity the nation has only dreamed of. But how Anura Kumara Disanayake and his team navigate these newfound opportunities and how they handle the intoxicating allure of power that has eluded them for decades remains the real test.



Temple Talks, Tavern Walks: Wigneswaran's Bar Permit Brew-ha-ha!

In a surprising revelation, it has come to light that a liquor license for the "A-9 Wine Store," located at Karadipokku Junction in Kilinochchi, was secured through the influence of Tamil People's National Alliance leader and former Northern Province Chief Minister, C.V. Wigneswaran. This has raised serious questions about the integrity of a leader who has long portrayed himself as the torchbearer of righteousness.

Wigneswaran, often presenting himself as a staunch advocate of justice and morality, has left many bewildered by this latest development. The question on everyone's mind is: How could a self-proclaimed, proud Saivaite—who claims to champion religious and moral values, and urges others to follow suit—stoop to securing a bar permit?

"C.V. Wigneswaran is the last person we'd

expect to facilitate a liquor business,” remarked a political observer. “For a man who professes such strong religious beliefs, securing a liquor license contradicts the very principles he claims to uphold.

What makes this situation even more perplexing is that Wigneswaran justified his actions by claiming the permit was obtained to help an orphaned woman, Thanusha Nadarasa, who had lost both her parents. “I obtained the license for a woman who had lost both her parents, not for myself,” Wigneswaran said when confronted about the matter. But critics argue that if his true intention was to help this orphaned woman, there are countless other ways he could have extended support. “Does helping an orphan really require setting her up with a bar permit?” asked a member of the public, raising doubts about the noble intentions behind the move.

While Wigneswaran tries to paint this as a compassionate act, sources indicate that the situation might not be as straightforward. Whispers from within political



circles suggest that this particular permit may have come with a hefty reward—but only time will tell if there’s more to this ‘gesture’ than meets the eye.

It’s also worth noting that under then-President Ranil Wickremesinghe’s administration, 172 liquor licenses were granted, with this particular one standing out due to its association with Wigneswaran. For a man who once spoke about “changing the system,” he seems to be getting rather comfortable with it.



Pushed into Retirement by an Unethical Politician, But God Had Bigger Plans: From GA to Governor – Vethanayagam Speaks



by:

Our Special Correspondent

A few years before, In a twist of fate, an honest and upright government servant who had devoted his entire career to serving the nation, even holding a crucial role during wartime as Kilinochchi's Government Agent (GA), was forced into early retirement. His only fault? Standing firm against the unethical appointments and transfers orchestrated by an immoral Jaffna Tamil politician. When he refused to comply, the politician used his influence to transfer him to a powerless post in a ministry, effectively sidelining his exemplary service. Deeply hurt by the injustice and corruption, this dedicated civil servant chose to retire three months earlier than planned, leaving the matter, in his words, "to God."

But life took a surprising turn. Recognizing his integrity and dedication, the newly elected President of Sri Lanka, Anura Kumara Dissanayake, and his National People's Power (NPP) party reached out to him. They offered him a role even more influential than his previous post: the Governor of the Northern Province. That civil servant is none other than Nagalingam Vethanayagam, a decorated figure in the Sri Lankan Administrative Service, now entrusted with greater responsibility as the Northern Province Governor.

Here are the highlights from our exclusive interview with Nagalingam Vethanayagam, the newly appointed Governor of the Northern Province:

Did you anticipate being appointed as a Governor, and how did your association with the NPP government come about?

I neither anticipated the appointment nor sought it. I had no communication with anyone, nor was I pursuing such a role. The National People's Power (NPP) approached me with their offer, stating they had an important position in mind. At first, I assumed it was a political appointment, and I made it unequivocally clear that I had no intention of engaging in politics. They then clarified that it was a governorship, free from any political affiliation. I agreed to consider the offer, and after a day of deliberation, I accepted the position on the condition that there would be no political interference in my duties as Governor. To my surprise, they wholeheartedly agreed and even emphasized that they were specifically seeking a Governor without political allegiance. They assured me that I would have complete autonomy to function without any political ties.

I am convinced that, under any other President, I would not have been selected for this position. Even if the appointment had been offered, it would have been exceedingly difficult to carry out my duties effectively. In fact, had the offer come from another administration, I would likely have declined. For me, serving the public with full independence is non-negotiable. Any form of interference dictating my actions would have rendered meaningful service impossible. This may have been the reality under previous governments, but with President Anura Kumara Dissanayake, the environment is entirely different.

Did the NPP government provide assurance that there would be no political intervention during your tenure as the Governor of the Northern Province?

Yes, they assured me of that. They specifically promised that I could work without any fear and follow my conscience. They clearly stated they would not interfere in my governorship, not even by one per cent.

Several NPP leaders have indicated to Jaffna Monitor that your selection as Governor was largely due to your impeccable reputation and the trust you've earned as a dedicated civil servant. Did they provide any reasons for choosing you for this role?

They conveyed that my integrity holds significant esteem, both publicly and within their internal ranks. They expressed unwavering confidence in my ethical standing, underscoring that my involvement would be instrumental in establishing a transparent and accountable administration in the Northern Province. It is on this foundation, I believe, that they approached me regarding the governorship. I understand that they conducted extensive consultations with key figures across the Northern Province to gather feedback before formally extending the offer to me.

You were compelled to leave your position as Government Agent just three months before your retirement due to the actions of a Jaffna politician. Now, you've returned to Jaffna, not just as a civil servant but as the Governor of the entire Northern Province. Can you tell us what exactly transpired?

Political interference was somewhat restrained during the "Good Governance" era under

Maithripala Sirisena. However, even then, a certain State Minister from Jaffna managed to exert his influence. He issued directives—ordering appointments and transfers—and demanded that I comply. One of his instructions was to select beneficiaries from a list he personally provided. I faced a choice: Should I choose those who genuinely needed assistance or follow the politician's instructions and pick his favoured individuals? I stood firm and refused to comply.

After the "Good Governance" period ended and Gotabaya Rajapaksa assumed the presidency, I had just three months before retirement. Unfortunately, the same politician had now been appointed Chairman of the Jaffna District Coordinating Committee and once again tried to impose his will through similar directives. I did not yield then, either.

With only a few months left in my career, he used his influence to have me transferred to a meaningless "dummy" position at the Ministry of Public Administration in Colombo. Under normal circumstances, no one nearing retirement with less than a year of service can be transferred—yet they went ahead and did it, causing me significant distress. I was left deeply disheartened and disillusioned. On the day I received the transfer order, I decided to retire with a heavy heart.

Was the minister you mentioned Douglas Devananda?

No, he wasn't a minister during Maithripala Sirisena's tenure. In fact, he only became a cabinet minister under Gotabaya Rajapaksa's presidency. However, he never interfered with my duties or made any unreasonable demands. He always treated me with respect and dignity.

As for the politician who tried to meddle



Newly appointed Northern Province Governor N. Vethanayagam receiving his official appointment from President Anura Kumara Dissanayake.

unethically in my work, I prefer not to name him directly, but I'm sure you can infer who it is. I'll leave that to your discretion.

During Sirisena's period, I somehow managed to withstand the pressures from that politician. However, once Gotabaya came into power, the situation escalated dramatically. His influence became intolerable, and it was clear he harboured resentment toward me for standing firm against his demands during the previous government. Once a more favourable administration came into power, he unleashed his full weight against me. At that point, he wasn't a minister, but he served as the Chairman of the Jaffna District Coordinating Committee, and he used that position to make my work increasingly difficult.

You retired prematurely with a heavy heart, and now you've returned to the same place but in an even higher

position. How do you view this?

I am a deeply religious person, and I interpret this turn of events as an act of divine intervention. When I was forced into early retirement, I was disheartened, feeling the weight of injustice, but I placed my burdens in God's hands. During that time, I often asked, "How can certain politicians behave this way, disregarding fairness and ethics?" It wasn't just personal frustration, but concern for the direction of the country. I questioned, "What does this mean for the future? Is there no end to this?" These were the thoughts I wrestled with in search of comfort and understanding.

While I prayed for justice and a resolution to the unfairness I faced, I never once asked for a position of power or authority. The idea of being appointed Governor never crossed my mind. It's not something I sought or expected. This role, in many ways, feels like something

beyond my own efforts—it feels like fate, or perhaps divine will, that brought me back in a position where I can now serve the people and the region in a meaningful way.

You came from a very humble background and have now reached the highest position in the Northern Province. Can you tell me about your upbringing and how it shaped who you are today?

My father, Nagalingam, was a well-respected teacher and social activist. He was also a Tamil Pandithar (scholar) who was deeply committed to social service. Whenever there was a land dispute or any community issue in our village, people would come to my father for guidance. They would fully accept his advice, and I witnessed this many times. I remember hearing villagers say, "If the Pandithar has spoken, it must be right." The trust the villagers had in him remained unwavering until his passing.

My father often said, "What greater happiness is there than serving people?" That was his guiding philosophy. Another principle he instilled in us was to live with integrity. He taught us never to desire another's belongings in any way. He often reminded us, "If you live honestly and walk the right path, and still face challenges, leave them in God's hands." These teachings have deeply influenced me and shaped the values I hold today.

What is God for you?

For me, God is closely tied to the concept of karma. I believe that everything we do in life—good or bad—has consequences, and that the universe, in its own time, balances these actions. God, in my view, the force

that governs this cycle of cause and effect. It's through karma that justice and fairness ultimately prevail.

In Jaffna Monitor, a former UN worker gave an exclusive testimony where he praised you as one of the finest Government Agents (GA) during the war, highlighting how you worked relentlessly, risking your life in the war zone. Could you elaborate on this?

That period was one of the most challenging times in my career. I was serving as the Government Agent (GA) of Kilinochchi District, right in the heart of the conflict zone. The war was at its peak, and the situation on the ground was dire. Roads were constantly under threat from landmines and artillery fire, with explosions happening regularly. Every time we had to travel, there was a real risk to our lives. We often traveled with white flags attached to our vehicles, signaling our neutrality as civil servants. Even then, the dangers were immense, and we had no guarantees of safety.

The work itself was relentless. The people were suffering, and it was our responsibility to ensure they had access to essential services—food, medical aid, and shelter. Every decision had life-or-death implications. Despite the ongoing conflict, we tried to maintain impartiality, and I'm thankful that both the military and the LTTE respected our efforts. They did not interfere with our duties, which allowed us to focus on serving the civilians caught in the crossfire.

According to our constitution, the role of Governor is meant to be non-political. However, there has been

a troubling precedent where many Governors have been involved in politics, with some even attending political rallies in support of the ruling government and its politicians. How do you plan to operate in this position?

I will strictly adhere to the non-political nature of the Governor's role. I have no intention of aligning myself with any political party or engaging in political activities. I am confident that this government will not ask me to compromise my position or involve me in political matters. My focus will be entirely on fulfilling my responsibilities impartially, without endorsing any political party or politician. My role is to serve the people, and I intend to do that without any political affiliations or influence.

How do you think this government is performing?

I believe the government is heading in the right direction. President Anura Kumara Dissanayake is delivering on the promises he made. Many people who spoke to me mentioned that if it had been any other President, someone like me—who is known for maintaining strict neutrality—would not have been chosen for this position. There is a strong sense of confidence that this President will honor the promises. In the past, many Presidents made numerous promises but failed to deliver. I, along with the public, trust that this government will not only make promises but also ensure they are fulfilled.

Regarding Tamil rights and power-sharing, what do you believe the President will do?

People believe he will follow through on what he has promised.

What are your plans for the Northern Province as Governor?

Public service should inspire trust and win the hearts of the people, which is also the vision of the President. Unfortunately, some government officials have not fulfilled their duties properly, leading to widespread disillusionment and frustration among the public. Many have suffered injustices as a result. My priority is to rebuild the people's faith in public institutions, ensuring that services are delivered fairly and efficiently. At the same time, I will focus on driving development projects that can run concurrently, ensuring that progress and good governance go hand in hand in the Northern Province.

What would you identify as your immediate priority upon assuming this role?

The immediate priority is structural change. That is crucial. We need to focus on implementing programs that will uplift the livelihoods of the grassroots population.

Can a Governor alone bring about structural change?

No, it cannot be done alone. But with the government's support and the collaboration of all stakeholders, we can bring about meaningful change. It requires a collective effort.

It seems like there's a noticeable change at the Governor's residence. Can you tell us about it?



President Anura Kumara Dissanayake in discussion with the newly appointed governors

Yes, there has been a change. The doors of the Governor's residence are open to everyone. Anyone wishing to meet me is welcome, as this space belongs to everyone. Even when I served as the Government Agent, people would come to see me as late as 8 PM, and I never turned anyone away. I believe in being accessible to the public, and that will continue here.

I am not one for luxury. My swearing-in ceremony was a simple event, without any extravagance, and I have instructed that future events I attend should remain simple and modest.

Every Monday, I will be available at the Governor's office for anyone who wishes to meet me. I also plan to travel across the districts to meet people directly. It's not

just about listening to their concerns; I am committed to taking concrete steps to resolve their issues. Without delivering results, the people will not regain trust.

Times have changed. If the same politician who once caused you difficulties were to approach you for help, how would you respond?

I have never believed in holding grudges or seeking revenge—it's simply not a part of my principles. If that politician were to approach me with a request that genuinely benefits the people, and if it is a just cause, I would assist without hesitation. My primary focus is always the well-being of the people, not personal grievances.

"I Now Question Our Decision to Decline Ministerial Posts During Sirisena's Government" - Sumanthiran

Part-2



BY:

Our Special Correspondent

From the Ilankai Tamil Arasu Kachchi (ITAK), I believe you are one of the few parliamentarians who openly criticize the misdeeds of the LTTE while still continuing to do so. How did you find the courage to speak up?

There's no special courage in speaking the truth. It's my commitment to it that drives me. I've always believed that truth has its own power. When Galileo said the Earth revolved around the sun, they tried to silence him, but did that change the truth? The same applies here. The truth doesn't change because it's uncomfortable or unpopular at the time.



Let me be clear: I don't criticize the LTTE as a whole, but I do address their specific wrongs. This isn't like the famous Vadivelu joke — 'If it happens to you, it's blood; if it happens to me, it's just tomato chutney.' A section of LTTE supporters think that way. When the Tigers stormed a mosque in Kattankudy and killed innocent people while they prayed, can we claim it wasn't real blood spilled, just tomato chutney? No. Wrong is wrong. Pointing out those wrongs isn't an attack on them; it's an acknowledgement of facts.

If we want the world to stand with us, we must also have the courage to stand by the truth. We, Tamils, often expect the international community to raise their voice for us, but how can we expect that if we refuse to face our own mistakes? We accuse the Sri Lankan government of war crimes based on international reports, and those very reports say that both sides were guilty of violations. Yet, some only want to cherry-pick the parts that suit their narrative, ignoring the rest. It doesn't work like that.

At the same time, I've always said we must honour the sacrifices of the LTTE fighters, those who gave their lives for our people. But that honour should come from a place of justice, not from covering up mistakes.

In the last election, even my own party members campaigned against me, accusing me of being "anti-Tamil nationalism." I spoke at over 500 meetings during the campaign, and at every single one, people asked, "Are you against the liberation struggle?" I gave them the same answer every time: "I do not believe in armed conflict. If you want someone who supports violence, don't vote for me."

And yet, I won. Many so-called "staunch Tamil nationalists" lost. Why? Because the people are smarter than we give them credit for. They're

tired of the old narratives. They want leaders who stand for the truth, not for myths and glorified half-truths. I'm not afraid of losing while standing for the truth. The people see it, and that's what matters.

By criticizing the LTTE, aren't you worried about being labelled a traitor?

No, I'm not worried because I'm not a traitor. I've addressed this in party meetings as well—those who call me a traitor do so out of fear. And frankly, their fear is justified. Many of them were the ones who acted as informants, pointing out people to the authorities at every opportunity. I never engaged in such activities, so I have no reason to be afraid of their labels.

When the LTTE was targeting EPRLF members, I was one of the people who stepped up to shelter those who managed to escape. I personally ensured they were safely transported to Colombo, where they found refuge at Colombo Hindu College. So, if standing by what's right makes me a traitor in their eyes, then so be it. I know my conscience is clear.

The LTTE had a powerful military presence, so why do you think they eventually fell? What do you believe were the reasons behind their downfall? Were there internal factors at play?

The late Mr Sampanthan often noted, even in Parliament, that the LTTE didn't allow space for human rights or democracy—a point some criticized but held true. As a militant group, they couldn't create room for democratic processes; had they done so, they wouldn't have functioned as such.

It's important to remember that the suffering of our people pushed the Tigers into rebellion. Their rise wasn't without cause. However, where the LTTE went wrong was in inflicting the same suffering on other communities. It wasn't enough for them to declare themselves against the Sinhalese; they needed to back this up with their actions. Targeting innocent Sinhalese civilians with bombings only alienated them further. And similarly, the LTTE's actions against the Muslim community—killing Muslims or expelling them from the North in a single day and seizing their properties—were grave mistakes.

As a community that had endured immense pain and suffering, we shouldn't have allowed the same suffering to be inflicted on others. If the LTTE had avoided these atrocities, there's a chance that the Sinhalese community might have viewed them as a committed and principled military force. Had they been more careful not to harm innocent civilians and made it clear that their struggle was purely for justice and rights, it could have fostered a different perception among the Sinhalese. In some alternate reality, things might have turned out differently if these mistakes hadn't been made.

What is your opinion on the forced recruitment conducted by the LTTE during the final stages of the war?

This is well-documented in UN reports. If we're calling for an international investigation into the final stages of the war, then the actions of the LTTE must also be scrutinized. It would be unreasonable to demand an investigation into the Sri Lankan government's actions while exempting the LTTE. That stance simply doesn't hold up.

The whole purpose of an international investigation is to ensure impartiality. If we truly seek justice, we can't expect investigators to turn a blind eye to our own misdeeds while focusing solely on the other side's faults. That doesn't make any sense.

For example, we accuse the Sri Lankan government of directing civilians into so-called "no-fire zones" and then shelling those areas. There's evidence to support this, and it occurred on three separate occasions. We argue that these actions must be investigated and those responsible held accountable. But to then claim that the LTTE's crimes, like forced recruitment, should not be investigated would be absurd. If we're demanding justice, it must be justice for all.

The LTTE's act of forced recruitment was wrong, wasn't it?

If it happened as documented in the UN reports, then yes, it was undoubtedly a serious wrongdoing.

In that case, why did you represent Kannadasan—a prominent LTTE member and a war criminal accused of forcibly recruiting more than 500 innocent children, dragging them into war? Hundreds of innocent children, some as young as 10, died because of him. A former UN employee even gave us an extensive interview detailing his war crimes. I assume you've read it? How could you stand in defence of such a man in court?

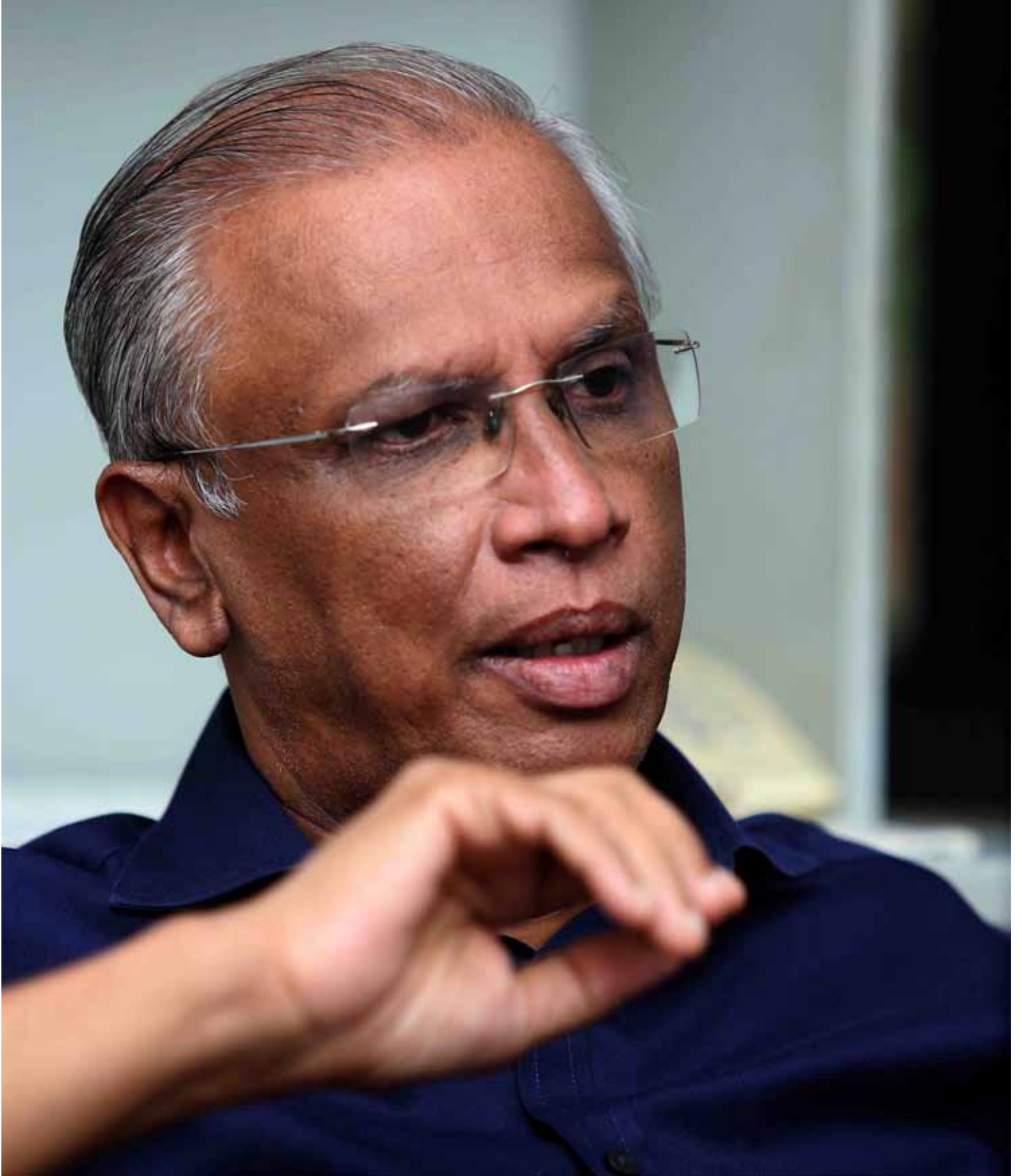
That case was tied to a specific incident of



forced recruitment. But as a lawyer, my duty is not to decide who deserves a defence and who doesn't. The law only works if every person, no matter how severe their alleged crimes, has the right to representation. If lawyers start refusing cases based on who the person is or what they're

accused of, the entire system breaks down. My role was to ensure the system functions as it should and to let justice prevail by giving everyone their day in court. Without that, we lose the very foundation of justice.

But was it really necessary for



you—an influential lawyer—to represent him directly? Defending someone like Kannadasan, accused of abducting over 500 innocent children for war, is no different from those so-called Tamil nationalist lawyers who defend drug dealers. How could you choose to protect someone like that?

In the case against Kannadasan, there was no evidence to prove that he was physically present where the alleged crime occurred. As a lawyer, my role is not to pass judgment but to ensure that the legal process is followed and that the rights of the accused are respected.

Some people accuse you of not taking up enough cases related to the rights of the Tamil people. What is your response to that?

Who represented the landmark case on land rights? Who led the legal battle and won when Sampur was leased to a foreign company for 250 years? It was me. Has anyone else taken real, meaningful action to ensure the release of Tamil lands?

One of the most critical cases I handled was defending our party's advocacy for federalism, which was challenged as a violation of the 6th Amendment. I successfully argued the case, and the court upheld our right to stand for federalism.

In 2007-08, when the pass system was unfairly imposed in Vavuniya, I took it to court and won. That victory was a landmark. Similarly, in 2007, when Gotabaya Rajapaksa forcibly evicted people staying in lodges in Colombo overnight, I fought the case in court and won.

So, to those who claim I haven't taken up enough Tamil rights cases, I ask—who else has fought and won these significant battles for our people?

What are the significant cases you're working on currently?

At present, I'm handling the case concerning Kurunthur Malai. I also recently won the case related to Vedukkunari Malai. In addition, I am managing 2,176 cases pertaining to the High-Security Zone in Palaly.

Many people focus on the cases I've won, but in reality, I've lost more cases than I've won. My former senior even nicknamed me the lawyer for lost causes.

The issues faced by Eastern Tamils are said to be different from those of Northern Tamils, particularly around land disputes with the Muslim community. Do you have a specific agenda to address the distinct needs of Eastern Tamils?

I fully agree. The challenges in the East are quite different, largely due to the unique ethnic composition of the region. Over the years, our population in the East has decreased, which has only added to the complexity of the situation. That's why we've had to take a different approach there, particularly regarding land disputes. These issues are far more pressing in the East compared to the North, and we're very conscious of that. We've tailored our strategies to address the distinct needs of Eastern Tamils, ensuring that their concerns are met in a way that truly reflects their reality.

There are claims that, like ITAK MP Shanakiyan Rasamanickam and others, you're more focused on addressing the concerns of the Eastern

"A section of LTTE supporters believes: 'If it happens to them, it's blood; if it happens to others, it's tomato chutney.'"

Muslim community, potentially at the expense of the welfare of the Eastern Tamils. How do you respond to these accusations?

The situation with the Muslim community in the East largely stems from a simple reality—limited land availability. One of the main reasons behind this issue is their significant population growth, which is notably higher than that of the Tamil community. This growth can be attributed to two main factors.

Firstly, there is a natural increase in population, as the Muslim community tends to marry early. While the Tamil population might go through one generation, Muslims often progress through two in the same period. Tamil families may have one or two children, whereas Muslim families might have five, six, or even more. Naturally, this leads to a much faster population growth among Muslims.

Secondly, many Tamils have permanently emigrated, while Muslims, even if they go abroad for work, tend to return after earning money, further adding to their numbers in the region. We cannot blame the Muslim community for their population growth—it's neither a crime nor something we can control.

As their population grows, the land they currently occupy becomes insufficient, particularly in places like Ampara, where the Muslim community has the least amount of land available. This forces them to seek new land, and they often move into areas

traditionally occupied by Tamils. Initially, they come as traders and, over time, buy land. This has led to the perception that Muslims are encroaching on Tamil lands and thriving more than the Tamils, but the truth is, it's simply a natural demographic shift. In such circumstances, what can we do?

Is it true that Muslims are encroaching on Tamil lands, and do you agree with this view?

Yes, it's true that Muslims are purchasing land in Tamil areas and expanding—that's a fact. At one point, Kattankudy was among the most densely populated areas in the world per square meter. The rapid population growth within a limited land space in Kattankudy has been the primary driver of this expansion. While we cannot blame the Muslim community for their natural population growth, it has undeniably led to a sense of frustration among the Tamil population.

What is your response to those who argue that you should support only the Tamils when it comes to Tamil and Muslim issues?

That's not necessary. The Tamil Arasu Katchi represents both communities. According to our party's constitution, our core policy is to advocate for a united Sri Lanka where both a Tamil government and a Muslim government are established on a federal basis. We believe in building a system that recognizes and respects

the rights of both Tamils and Muslims, ensuring fair representation and governance for all. Supporting only one community would go against the very principles our party stands for.

Do Muslims vote for your party?

In the early days, Muslims did vote for us. They don't anymore. It was only in 1987 that political parties specifically representing Muslims emerged. Before that, there were no political parties solely for the Muslim community.

So, Do you speak for Muslims on a moral basis now?

Yes, it is purely on a moral basis. And not just for Muslims, we must also speak for the Sinhalese as well.

Why didn't you accept ministerial positions during the 'Good Governance' Government headed by Maithripala Sirisena?

Looking back, I now question whether that decision was the right one. At the time, I was among those who believed we should not accept ministerial positions, thinking it was best to remain independent of the government. However, in hindsight, there were moments where accepting those roles might have allowed us to secure quicker solutions for our people.

Today, our political strength has diminished considerably—we're no longer viewed as a significant minority. In such circumstances, staying solely in opposition may not always be the most effective way to achieve progress.

Now, this doesn't mean we should align ourselves with forces that oppress us. But it does mean that when a government is open to cooperation, we must be willing to work with them to achieve our goals.

Take, for example, Thondaman in 1977 when he was the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) leader. The party allowed him to join the government, and despite being just one representative in a government with a 5/6 majority, he successfully secured citizenship rights for upcountry Tamils by working with the United National Party (UNP).

We can't say his decision to collaborate with a government perceived as oppressive in order to help an oppressed community was wrong—it was strategic. Sometimes, when we lack direct political power, we must find alternative ways to achieve our objectives.

When the situation arises for joining the government, will you make that decision independently, or will it be a collective party decision?

It will be a collective decision made by the party. When it comes to such significant matters, the primary party representing the people must decide on behalf of the entire community.

Many have misquoted Thanthai Chelva's famous statement, "Only God can save the Tamils now," taking it out of context. In reality, he said this in April 1970 at the Jaffna Kachcheri, after the parliamentary election results were announced. Before that, in the 1960 election, Thanthai Chelva had supported a major party, and in 1965, he even formed an alliance with the UNP to establish a government. At that time, the Tamil Arasu

"We accuse the Sri Lankan government of war crimes based on international reports, yet those same reports clearly state that both sides were guilty of violations."

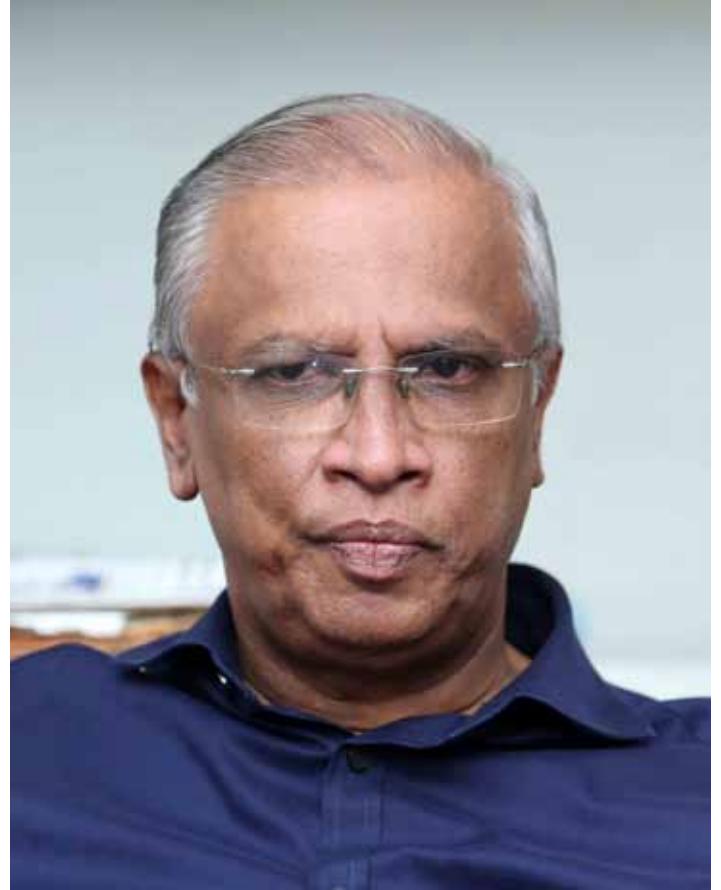
Katchi played a crucial role in shaping the government.

Even in the 1970 election, Thanthai Chelva was preparing to once again leverage the party's influence. However, the SLFP, along with the Trotskyist LSSP and the Communist Party, formed the United Front coalition and secured a two-thirds majority. This eliminated the need for Tamil Arasu Katchi's support, and with that, the party lost its bargaining power. It was only then that Thanthai Chelva remarked, "Only God can save the Tamils now," because the Sinhalese rulers no longer needed our support to govern.

Thanthai Chelva was always strategic, seizing moments when the Sinhalese rulers needed our party's support. He negotiated wisely and joined the government when it was necessary for our people. Remembering this side of his leadership when we consider our future political decisions is crucial.

Our struggle was taken over by the LTTE and ultimately fractured. What should the Sri Lankan Tamils do next?

The only viable path forward is power-sharing. In the North, Tamils are the clear majority, and in the East, they also hold a significant presence. If power is shared in a way that allows Tamils to govern the areas where they form the majority, these regions can retain their distinct Tamil identity. Without this, we risk being engulfed by Sinhala extremist forces.



The key to preventing this lies in the proper devolution of governmental powers. This is what we mean when we speak of a federal system. Even if it's not called 'federalism,' power-sharing is the solution. It will ensure that Tamils have control over their own regions, preserving our identity and securing a future where we can thrive as a community within a united Sri Lanka.

Many have accused you of being involved in Colombo-centric politics. What is your response to those who claim you do not understand the

sentiments of people affected by the war and are focused only on Colombo?

Colombo is the capital and the hub of decision-making. To effectively address our issues, we have to engage where the real decisions are made. As long as Colombo remains the political center of Sri Lanka, our efforts must naturally be focused there. But let me be clear—this does not mean I am disconnected from the people or unaware of the struggles of those affected by the war.

I am fully committed to representing the voices of the war-affected communities. I give equal attention to both securing our political rights in the national arena and addressing the real, day-to-day needs of the people who have suffered the most.

In the recent internal party election of the ITAK, your opponents, particularly S. Yogeswaran and others, accused you of being anti-Hindu and claimed you were involved in Christian conversions. What is your response to



these allegations?

These accusations are entirely baseless and unjust. I have never mixed religion with politics and strongly believe in keeping my faith separate from my political responsibilities. Many people may not even know that I am a Christian, but I've never hidden that fact. I'm a practising Christian who attends church every Sunday, and I also serve as a preacher. I was the Vice President of the Methodist Church. Despite my religious identity, I have

always drawn a clear line between my personal beliefs and my political duties. The Tamil people have never seen my faith as an issue, and neither do I.

In the recent Tamil Arasu Katchi leadership election, Yogeswaran used religious identity as a tactic against me. He announced his candidacy for the president post, but in the end, he asked his supporters to transfer their votes to Sritharan. Interestingly, Yogeswaran didn't receive a single vote—not even his own—which makes one wonder why he even contested the election in the first place.

It was a clever political manoeuvre by Sritharan, who didn't want to be seen as directly inciting religious sentiment, especially since there are Christian voters within the party. By using Yogeswaran to stoke religious issues, Sritharan aimed to attract those votes while maintaining a neutral image himself. It was a calculated strategy.

What is your personal opinion about Sritharan?

Sritharan has clarity, substance, and a strong ability to connect with people. I've known him for a long time, and he collaborates well on many issues. However, he can be influenced by others, particularly those with more extreme views. This might be a result of his experiences in Kilinochchi during the war, which may have shaped his tendency to quickly respond to hardline positions.

Is there any benefit for him in this behaviour?

I don't think there is a direct benefit, but it seems to have become part of his mindset over time.

What are his strengths and weaknesses?

His strength lies in his remarkable ability to mobilize people and present his arguments highly persuasively. He has a natural talent for rallying support and making his case convincingly.

However, his key weakness is his struggle to communicate effectively outside of Tamil, particularly in English. Despite being a Member of Parliament for over 15 years, he hasn't made significant progress in improving his English. While this isn't necessarily a fault, it has led to a noticeable inferiority complex. At times, he has expressed frustration, asking, "Do you think less of me because I don't speak English?"—which is certainly not how we see him. But it's something that weighs on him personally, and it shows.

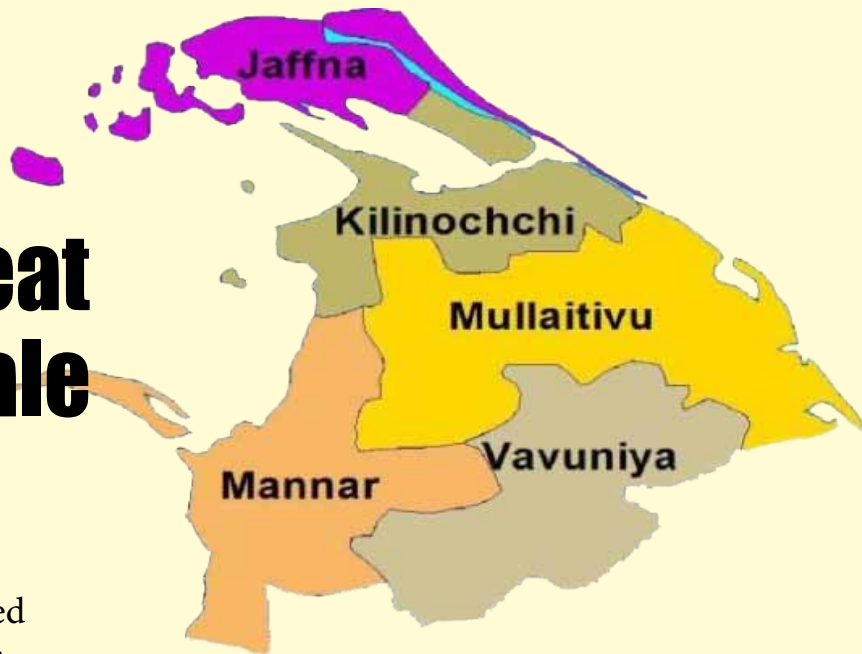
Do you think he has been influenced or "bought" by diaspora money?

No, I don't believe he has been bought. However, when someone receives continuous financial support from abroad, it can become challenging to act against the expectations of those providing the funds. This doesn't mean he's been "bought," but it can create a situation where it's difficult to go against the wishes of his financial supporters.

The End

**Photos by
Our Photographer**

Jaffna Loses Parliamentary Seat Amidst Large-Scale Migration



The Election Commission has announced a reduction in the number of Members of Parliament (MPs) representing the Jaffna electoral district, with the total dropping from 7 to 6. This change affects the Jaffna electoral district, which includes the administrative districts of Jaffna and Kilinochchi. In the upcoming general election, scheduled for November 14, only 6 MPs will be elected from the district. Similarly, Colombo has also seen a decrease, losing one seat and bringing its total from 19 to 18.

This decision by the Election Commission is based on voter registration data, which indicates a sharp decline in the voter base in both Jaffna and Colombo. The reduction in Jaffna's representation is being linked to a mass migration of Tamils, particularly to countries like Canada. Data shows that around 20,000 youth from Jaffna migrated to Canada in the past year alone, following the Canadian government's relaxation of visa policies for Sri Lankan nationals.

Political analysts have pointed out that this migration crisis is rooted in long-standing socio-economic problems in Jaffna, which they argue have been largely neglected by Tamil nationalist politicians. "Instead of addressing key issues such as job creation and improving

local infrastructure, our political leaders are stuck in a cycle of divisive rhetoric and identity politics," one analyst remarked.

Another political observer noted that the strong desire among Jaffna Tamils to settle abroad has also contributed to this exodus. "For many, the idea of migrating to a foreign country represents hope for a better future, especially when local opportunities remain limited," the observer added.

The impact of this migration is now being felt in the political arena. If this trend continues, experts warn that Jaffna's representation in Parliament could shrink even further in future elections.

Local commentators argue that the solution lies in economic development. "Job creation and real economic opportunities could help curb migration, but these hollow speeches and empty promises from Tamil nationalist leaders are doing little to retain our youth," a community leader noted. If the current rate of outmigration persists, Jaffna's political representation may face further cuts—a stark warning that should push for urgent action beyond mere political rhetoric.

Prabhakaran Was a Big-Time Loser When It Came to Targeting Me:

Douglas Devananda

Part-2



BY:
Our Reporter

How would you address the political parties and Tamil leaders who continue to align themselves with the ideology of the Tigers in today's context?

The ideology of the Tigers, that of their leader Prabhakaran, is not only defeated but also outdated. Those who claim to adhere to it now are simply engaging in opportunistic, vote-grabbing politics. A prime example of this is the Tamil National People's Front (TNPFF).

Its MP, Gajendran, used to grandstand in Parliament, even throwing books and files at me during the height of the 'Tigers' influence. Yet, in person, he would act in a completely subdued manner.



At one point in Parliament, he made the provocative statement that 40,000 coffins should be prepared because the LTTE would eliminate that many Sinhala soldiers in the North. This caused significant anger among the people and politicians in southern Sri Lanka. However, despite all this bravado, what did Gajendran do during the final stages of the war? He fled abroad, got married, and after the conflict ended, brokered a deal with Gotabaya Rajapaksa, the then Defence Secretary, to return to Sri Lanka. He even managed to secure the release of his brother, who had been detained by the Sri Lankan government.

This sums up the true nature of politicians who claim to follow the Tigers' ideology. They use it as a convenient facade while pursuing personal gains. We didn't choose that path, did we?

To the parties and politicians who proudly thump their chests, claiming to follow the LTTE and its leader's ideology, I would like to remind them that this mindless, violent ideology dragged thousands of innocent Tamils to Mullivaikal and was the primary cause of our people's suffering. If you continue to cling to it, you will one day be defeated not by external forces but by our own people.

While other Tamil leaders, especially those from militant groups, either fled abroad in fear of Prabhakaran or surrendered and became mere mouthpieces of the LTTE, what gave you the courage to stand against him?

I saw Prabhakaran as a poisonous entity—like a venomous insect whose very presence was harmful to everyone around him. I truly believed the world would be better off without him. However, I held no personal

grudge against the ordinary Tiger fighters; they were merely misled. My conviction only grew stronger as I watched Prabhakaran kill many of my close relatives, comrades, friends and associates, which further solidified my determination to stay in this country and oppose his destructive policies.

The Tigers had a reputation for eliminating anyone who stood in their way. LTTE sources we've spoken to mentioned that, while Prabhakaran tried to have you killed, his inability to do so eventually earned you a grudging respect from him. A writer even remarked that Prabhakaran's biggest failure was Douglas Devananda. So, how did Prabhakaran fail to get you? And how did you manage to escape his grasp?

I was absolutely convinced that Prabhakaran couldn't kill me—nor would I ever die by his hands. This wasn't just blind faith; I took every precaution to protect myself. I knew, without a shred of doubt, that I couldn't trust Prabhakaran or his Tigers—not even 0.0001%. That's why I'm still alive today. There's a Tamil saying, 'Only a snake knows another snake's legs,' and I had a deep understanding of how Prabhakaran operated—his mindset, his tactics. I could anticipate his every move, which always kept me one step ahead. For example, I developed the habit of sleeping while remaining alert to the faintest vibrations in the ground, aware that the LTTE could be tunnelling beneath me at any moment. Constantly changing my location also made it nearly impossible for them to target me.

When I lived on Park Road in Colombo, we set

up security sentries around the house. At that time, some members of my party, including Chandrakumar, suggested that since we had embraced the democratic path, such security measures were no longer necessary. However, my goal wasn't to prepare for an attack but to ensure that the Tigers knew we were always on high alert. This would make them think twice before attempting anything. Without these precautions, we would only realize they were upon us when it was too late.

Let me give you another example. Around this time, false rumours were spread by Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga and others, claiming that we were armed hitmen for Premadasa, plotting to assassinate her and her mother. These baseless accusations created immense pressure, forcing us to leave Park Road. Unable to possess weapons for self-defense in Colombo, we had to surrender the few firearms we had. We then moved to Trincomalee with plans to head to the Jaffna islands. While waiting for a ship, we received the news that Premadasa had been assassinated by the Tigers.

After that, we returned to Colombo. I was convinced that I needed to stay in the capital and establish a base there, as I believed it would allow me to better address the issues and concerns of the Tamil people. We came back to Colombo and ended up staying covertly in a house in Havelock Town. This time, there were no sentries or security systems in place.

That's when the Tigers launched their first commando attack in Colombo. Without any sensors or early warnings, we only realized the attack was happening when they were at our doorstep. Tragically, four of my comrades lost their lives in that attack. However, thanks to the precautions I had taken, eight of us,



including myself, managed to escape. Despite the sophisticated weaponry the LTTE used in the assault, we survived. Had we maintained the level of security we had on Park Road, such an attack might have been thwarted.

How did the LTTE manage to carry out such a bold attack in the heart of Colombo—especially their first commando operation in the capital? Military commanders we've spoken to have said that escaping an attack of that magnitude was nearly impossible. So, how did the attack unfold, and how did you manage to escape unharmed?

The Tigers used someone I knew personally to gather intelligence for that attack. He was from Ariyalai, Jaffna—someone I had known for a long time. Back when my father worked for the Petroleum Corporation, this man used to sell kerosene door-to-door with a small cart.

He came to my home in Colombo and, during that visit, passed on precise details about the house—both the interior and exterior—to the LTTE. Later, he returned, showed me the scars on his back, and apologized. He explained that the Tigers had brutally tortured him and forced him into betraying me.

I typically met people in a small room downstairs in the house, and the informant had told the Tigers that this was where I stayed. So, they specifically targeted that room with grenades, bullets, and rocket launchers, believing I would be there. However, what they didn't know was that I never stayed there.

Wherever I stayed, I always had a secret escape route, regardless of the location. While the Tigers were attacking, bombarding

the building with bullets and grenades, my comrades and I managed to escape. The Tigers, however, believed they had succeeded, convinced that I had been killed.

I stayed silent for a few hours, allowing the LTTE and their supporters to celebrate (he laughs), thinking they had finally eliminated me. After some time, I picked up the phone and called President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga to inform her that I was still alive. Even she had believed I was dead until I made that call.

A senior Journalist once claimed that I was calmly eating Idiyappa Kottu (or String Hopper Kottu) and drinking coffee when the surprise attack began. But in reality, I don't drink coffee or tea at all. Many writers embellish such details for dramatic effect, but the truth is quite different. At that time, for security reasons, we never ate food from outside—everything was cooked at home to ensure safety. As you asked earlier, one Saiva religious preacher even accused me of operating like a militant leader. In truth, it was my survival instinct and preparedness—much like that of a militant leader—that saved my life that day and during many other attacks.

The next morning, you gave an interview to a prominent news agency, stating, 'Prabhakaran can't kill me.' Do you remember making that statement?

Yes, yes. I said it because it was true—Prabhakaran tried multiple times to eliminate me. He sent two suicide bombers and even orchestrated a brutal attack on me at Kalutara Prison, but he couldn't kill me. When it came to targeting me, he was a big-time loser.

Prabhakaran operated entirely from the

shadows, always hidden behind layers of bunkers and security. He never participated in battles himself, nor did he openly meet people. In fact, he wouldn't even meet his own LTTE guards without thoroughly screening and checking them first. He lived in constant fear, always shielded from danger.

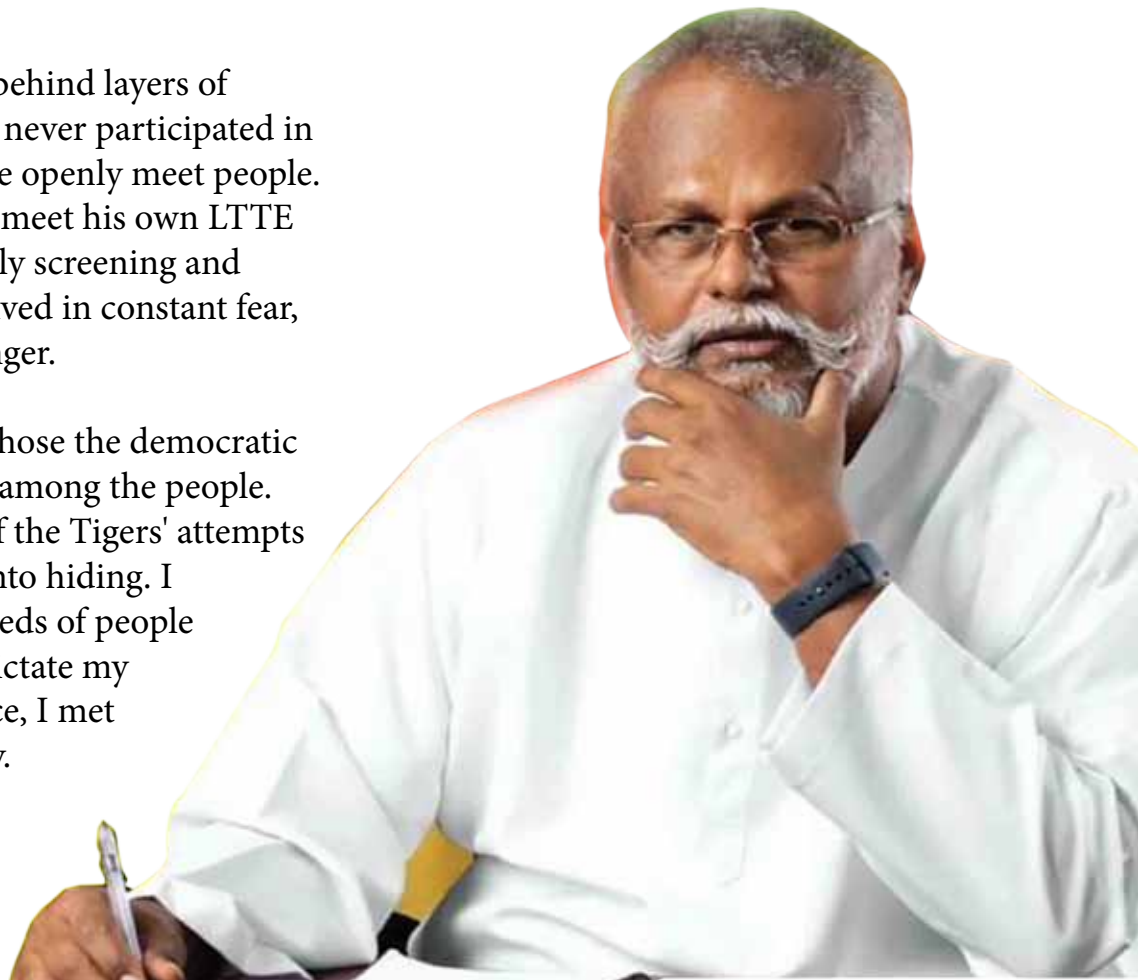
In contrast, ever since I chose the democratic path, I have lived openly among the people. Even during the height of the Tigers' attempts to kill me, I never went into hiding. I continued to meet hundreds of people daily, never letting fear dictate my actions. In my Jaffna office, I met thousands of people daily.

Now, ask yourself: who showed more courage—Prabhakaran, who hid in bunkers and

ordered bombings and killings, or me, who faced the world every day despite numerous assassination attempts, never running, never hiding?

During Prabhakaran's peak, when he was revered as the "Sun God" and managed to rally the majority of Tamils behind him—whether through fear or manipulation—did you foresee his defeat?

Absolutely. I always believed that Prabhakaran could be defeated, and I was certain the world would be a better place without him. My anger towards him wasn't solely because he murdered my brother, Premanandha, or killed close relatives, associates like Maheswari Velayutham, and comrades like Bala Nadaraja Iyer, among many others. It stemmed from the fact that he was the primary cause of our people's suffering. Every hardship the Tamil



people endured, both past and present, could be traced back to Prabhakaran's actions.

Is there a particular killing of someone close to you by Prabhakaran that deeply affected you?

Each one of those murders brought me deep sorrow. There was no hierarchy in the pain they caused me. But those deaths fueled my resolve even further. They filled me with an unshakable determination to stay here, among my people, and resist Prabhakaran's fascism from within our own land. Many of my relatives and friends living abroad urged me to leave everything and join them. Some even suggested that I align myself with Prabhakaran. But I refused.

I remember when Soosai, the former LTTE Sea Tiger commander, once claimed that no one could ever get close to Prabhakaran, and if they did, not even grass would grow within



a 10-kilometer radius. But look at how it all ended. Prabhakaran, who was once feared and seen as invincible, was killed like a coward in the waters of Nandikadal. I always knew this would be his fate.

Recently, I visited Mullaitivu. Prabhakaran could never have imagined, even in his wildest dreams, that he would one day be killed and that I would walk freely through Mullaitivu, working to help the very people he once terrorized.

What was the reason for Chandrakumar, who was once close to you, splitting off to form his own party?

I had initially intended for Chandrakumar to succeed me as the leader of the party. He was intelligent and capable, and I began preparing him for that role. However, those around him began to mislead and confuse him. After the war, he became involved with pro-Tiger

elements. My visits to Kilinochchi, the 'Tigers' stronghold, where I spoke out against the LTTE, didn't sit well with these groups. They influenced Chandrakumar, and unfortunately, he fell into their orbit.

Even in the late 1990s, out of fear of the Tigers, Chandrakumar distanced himself from me and the country, taking some of my closest comrades abroad with him. When he tried to reconnect with me after the war, one of my early comrades—whom I had raised like a younger brother—returned from abroad and warned me not to trust him. He revealed that Chandrakumar had been responsible for taking him away in the first place and couldn't be relied upon. Despite this warning, I placed my trust in Chandrakumar once again, but ultimately, I was proven wrong.

How were negative perceptions about you planted among a large number of people?

It was largely the result of false propaganda. The Tigers went to great lengths to portray me as a villain—depicting me as some kind of monster with horns and sharp fangs. They carefully crafted a narrative that painted me as a brutal figure. Unfortunately, many media outlets, driven by fear of the Tigers, chose to spread these falsehoods. This caused a large number of innocent people who had never even met me to believe these distorted stories and view me in a negative light.

I never felt the need to aggressively counter this narrative or promote myself because I always believed my actions and principles would speak louder than any propaganda. And let's not forget that the Tamil people continued to elect me to Parliament for over 30 years. If I had truly been the kind of person the Tigers and their supporters claimed, that would have never happened. The trust of the people ultimately reveals the truth, not the false rumors spread by those with an agenda.

In the recent presidential election, the candidate you supported, Ranil Wickremesinghe, was defeated. How do you view this outcome? Additionally, at the time of the first part of this interview, you were a senior member of the government and the Cabinet Minister of Fisheries. Now that you're no longer in that position, how do you feel about this change?

We made a bold and strategic choice to support Ranil Wickremesinghe, keeping in mind the aspirations of the Tamil-speaking people and the broader economic challenges the country faces. While the majority of Sri Lankans opted for change, I fully respect their

democratic will. At the same time, I remain optimistic that the newly elected President, Comrade Anura Kumara Dissanayake, will pursue his vision of creating a more equitable society and addressing the hopes of all citizens.

As for my position as Minister of Fisheries—titles come and go, but my commitment to the people remains steadfast. Whether I hold office or not is secondary to me. I sincerely thank those who have supported our political journey. For decades, I've worked with an unwavering dedication to serving the people, always prioritizing national reconciliation and progress. Holding office doesn't define my work—it's the values and vision I stand for that matter most.

What motivates you to remain involved in politics?

I was among those who initiated the armed struggle, and in some ways, I feel a sense of responsibility for the current challenges my people face. I bear a moral duty to continue working for their well-being. Like other leaders, I could have surrendered to Prabhakaran, fled abroad, or simply stepped away and remained inactive in the country. But my connection to these people runs much deeper than that.

I feel a profound emotional bond with them, and abandoning them in their time of need was never an option. I believe it's my responsibility to stay with them, working towards a future where their struggles are eased. Whether I hold office or not, I am driven by a deep commitment to seeing our people flourish and overcome the hardships that have plagued them for so long.

The End.



Wigneswaran "Retires"

from Elections at the Youthful Age of 84

Much to the relief of many in Jaffna, Jaffna District MP and former Justice C.V. Wigneswaran has announced that he will not be contesting in the upcoming parliamentary elections. However, before anyone celebrates, there's a twist—he's not entirely stepping away from politics. At the "youthful" age of 84, Wigneswaran is presenting his decision as a grand "sacrifice" for the benefit of the younger generation. While most people his age might be enjoying their retirement, Wigneswaran seems determined to continue serving, defying expectations.

In a press release, Wigneswaran framed his exit from the election race as an act of pure

altruism. He explained that he is graciously stepping aside to give the youth their much-deserved opportunity in the political spotlight. The timing is noteworthy—after all, when he last contested the parliamentary elections in 2020, he was already 80 years old. Fast-forward four years, and now, Wigneswaran has seemingly realized that maybe it's time to let the younger generation take the reins.

But don't think for a moment that Wigneswaran is disappearing from the political scene. Instead, he appears to be taking on the role of a political elder statesman, ensuring his influence continues to shape Tamil politics.

Continued on page 50

Sumanthiran's 'Sumanthiram': Putting the 'I' in ITAK and the 'Me' in Media



During the last presidential election, the Illankai Tamil Arasu Kachchi (ITAK), once the dominant force in Tamil politics, found itself caught in a comical downward spiral of confusion and contradiction. Factions within the party were fiercely divided over which presidential candidate to support, turning what should have been a strategic decision into a farcical debacle. Bewildered by the lack of direction, long-time supporters watched in disbelief as their once-proud political organization descended into chaos.

At the heart of this circus was ITAK leader

Mavai Senathiraja, whose political juggling act felt straight out of a Vadivelu comedy sketch. If you recall the famous line, "For the money I got from him, I voted for the ladder; for the money I got from you, I voted for the coconut tree," you'd think Mavai had taken it to heart. He practically endorsed all three major candidates simultaneously, leaving everyone scratching their heads. In an era where clarity is king, ITAK was serving confusion by the bucketload. Party members were left wondering: "Who exactly are we supposed to support again?"

In an almost theatrical twist, during a campaign rally in Manipay, Jaffna, attended by Opposition Leader Sajith Premadasa, Sumanthiran ceremoniously handed over the newspaper to Sajith Premadasa, making quite the show of it. The best part? The newspaper was distributed free of charge to the rally-goers as if to ensure that no one missed out on the latest episode of Sumanthiran's political soap opera.



The articles in the newspaper included pieces such as "Why ITAK Supports Sajith," "Why Ranil Must Be Defeated," and "The Tamil Common Candidate: A Political Suicide."

But here's where the whole thing took a hilariously bizarre turn. Instead of a title that evoked unity or political gravitas, the newspaper was called... wait for it... Sumanthiram. Yes, Sumanthiran named the entire paper after himself. And if that wasn't narcissistic enough, the logo featured none other than a smiling caricature of Sumanthiran himself, as if to say, "Look at me! I'm the solution!"

The moment the newspaper hit the streets, it was like handing out punchlines instead of political guidance. Instead of clarifying ITAK's position, the whole exercise became the punchline of every political joke in town. Supporters didn't know whether to laugh or cry. Questions started flying: "If they really wanted clarity, why didn't they just reprint the now-defunct Suthanthiran, ITAK's official newspaper? Why the need for such self-glorification?"

Instead of rallying ITAK's confused base, Sumanthiram blew up in Sumanthiran's face like a botched magic trick.



Voters, already worn out by the party's endless clown show, took one look at the newspaper and saw it for what it was—a shiny, oversized tribute to Sumanthiran's ego. According to sources, a few disillusioned supporters, lost in a fog of political despair, ended up voting for Sangu (the conch), the symbol of the common Tamil candidate. The punchline? This was the very candidate Sumanthiran had passionately warned everyone not to support.

Rather than rescuing ITAK from the edge of disaster, Sumanthiram turned the party's crisis into a full-blown political comedy of Shakespearean proportions. What started as an attempt to "clarify" ITAK's stance quickly spiraled into an unintentional farce, revealing Sumanthiran's ego to be as inflated as a hot air balloon, while his and the party's credibility plummeted faster than the newspaper circulation. The election may be long over, but the legend of Sumanthiram—the paper, not the man—still lives on as one of the most jaw-dropping spectacles in the grand circus of Tamil political theatre.



Mirage of Resettlement:

JAFFNA MUSLIMS STRUGGLE DECADES AFTER DISPLACEMENT

BY: **R.Ram**

More than three decades after their forced eviction from the Northern Province, thousands of Muslim families who returned to their ancestral lands in Jaffna still face an uncertain future, living in temporary shelters without permanent homes or basic amenities. Despite their hopes of resettling, these families remain trapped in a cycle of hardship, with little progress made on housing or land allocation.

In a poignant reflection of their ongoing struggles, Sharmina Sahabdeen, a third-generation Muslim originally from Pommaiveli near Jaffna, recounted her return to Jaffna on September 16, 2002, with optimism. "We came back with immeasurable joy, thinking we were finally returning home. But 22 years later, we still don't have permanent land or homes. Our lives are confined to temporary tin-roofed shacks," she said.



Sharmina is one of many who returned to their ancestral land only to find themselves living in makeshift homes with no access to basic infrastructure. "Our daily life revolves around public toilets, community wells, and water supply limited to just an hour a day. The heat inside the shacks is unbearable in the dry season, and during the rainy season, we deal with waist-deep floods," she explained.

Her story is not unique. Sharmina also shared the tragic story of losing her mother during the floods. "When the floods hit last time, my mother fell ill and contracted an infection, according to the doctors. Despite treatments, she passed away," she said tearfully.

16 Years On, Still No Permanent Homes

Katheerja, another returnee, spoke of her family's displacement during the 1990 eviction and their subsequent struggle to resettle. "We were expelled from Jaffna and went to Puttalam. We returned to Jaffna 16

years ago, but we still haven't been able to identify land or obtain the necessary documents. That's why we're still living in these temporary huts," she said.

Though many families have returned, they continue to face bureaucratic challenges in securing land. "We manage in these huts, but our children suffer the most. Their education is constantly disrupted by the floods. Our time may have passed, but for our children's future, education is the key. Yet, the environment doesn't allow them to study properly," she added, expressing her frustration.

Despite returning more than 15 years ago, 278 families remain unable to build permanent homes or benefit from government housing schemes. They reside in rented houses in and around Jaffna, while others, without opportunities to construct homes, have relocated elsewhere in the country.

Historical Displacement and Unfulfilled Promises

The expulsion of Muslims from the Northern Province in October 1990 remains one of the darkest chapters in the region's history. Over a two-week period, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) forced out approximately 14,400 Muslim families (about 5% of the province's population) from their homes. Families left behind their properties and belongings, fleeing with just 500 rupees and

the clothes on their backs, as they crossed the boundaries of the Northern Province.

Many of these displaced families are scattered across the country, with some settling in areas such as Puttalam, Negombo, and Panadura. Only a few sought refuge abroad. Despite returning to their homeland, many of these families still struggle to secure permanent resettlement and housing.

The issue is compounded by bureaucratic hurdles and the lack of adequate land allocation. "When we were displaced in 1990, there were 3,500 families. Now, our numbers have grown to 15,000. Yet, only about 1,000 families have returned, and just 250 families have received housing schemes. What happened to the rest of us?" asked a young man from the resettled community in Pommaiveli, who requested anonymity.

Continued Hardships

While 278 families continue to live in rented houses without their own land, others, despite owning ancestral land, cannot build homes due to building regulations. Urban Development Authority rules require at least six and a half perches of land to construct a house, but many Muslim families have less than this, and thus cannot build homes for their growing families.

The situation is dire for younger generations, who find themselves living in overcrowded conditions with no prospect of housing support. Many families now face the possibility of being displaced once again, as they lack the resources to improve their living conditions.

Calls for Action

Muslim community leaders and activists have been calling for more robust action from the government to address these issues. The Muslim Peace Secretariat has put forward an

11-point proposal, urging the government to expedite resettlement efforts and provide necessary housing and land support to displaced Muslims.

Some of the key demands include:

The establishment of a Presidential Commission to investigate the forced eviction of Muslims in 1990 and recommend necessary reparations.

Prioritizing housing assistance for the displaced Muslim community.

Ensuring that displaced Muslims retain ownership of their ancestral lands.

Increasing compensation for those affected by the 1990 expulsion.

Despite these demands being put forward two years ago, there has been little progress in implementing the proposals, leaving the displaced community in limbo.

A Bleak Future

Human rights activist Shreen Saroor highlighted the failures in the resettlement process, stating, "Resettlement is seen as a favor, not as a right. For years, the resettlement of Muslims has been delayed due to issues related to land ownership. It took nearly ten years to establish an office for displaced Muslims in Puttalam. Despite multiple housing schemes, such as the 50,000 Indian Housing Project, strict eligibility criteria have left many affected families without access to these resources."

As more than 1,490 families express their desire to return to Jaffna, the government faces increasing pressure to address the land and housing crisis for the displaced Muslim population. Yet, without substantial action, the long-held dream of resettlement remains a mirage for many.

Growing Friction: Jaffna Auto Drivers Target PickMe Rival Over Lower Fares



A PickMe auto driver was reportedly assaulted outside the Jaffna Teaching Hospital, highlighting escalating tensions between traditional auto drivers and PickMe service providers. The driver, who lodged a formal complaint at the Jaffna Police Station, alleges that law enforcement failed to take appropriate action following the attack.

The incident appears to be a symptom of the growing frustration among traditional auto drivers in Jaffna, driven by the rise of PickMe—a ride-hailing app that has disrupted the local auto industry with its competitive pricing. Before PickMe's arrival, auto fares in Jaffna were notoriously high, with short trips, such as those from Jaffna town to nearby

areas like Kokuvil or Kondavil (within a 5 km radius), typically costing between LKR 1,000 and 1,200. The introduction of PickMe has significantly lowered these rates, cutting into the income of many traditional drivers, who are now expressing anger and hostility toward PickMe drivers.

The victim recounted the events that led to the assault: "Outside the Jaffna Teaching Hospital, a passenger booked my service through the PickMe app. As I arrived to pick them up, another auto driver at the stand intervened, preventing the passenger from boarding my vehicle. Then, he physically assaulted me."

Despite reporting the incident, the PickMe driver claims that the police response was inadequate. "I filed a formal complaint at the Jaffna Police Station. Although the attacker was summoned, the female officer conducting the inquiry appeared biased and hostile towards

me. She seemed to side with the attacker, who, during the inquiry, even threatened to harm me in her presence. I had no choice but to leave the station without a proper resolution," he added.

The driver has since expressed his intention to escalate the issue to senior police officials, as no satisfactory action has yet been taken.

This incident sheds light on the broader resentment among traditional auto drivers, whose incomes have been severely affected by PickMe's competitive pricing. Many local drivers, who previously benefited from charging higher rates, are increasingly voicing their anger over the growing presence of PickMe. This growing friction has led to several incidents, like the one outside the hospital, as drivers struggle to maintain their livelihoods.

Wigneswaran....

While he won't be on the ballot, Wigneswaran's presence will remain ever-present in the background.

His "political service" isn't ending, either. According to Wigneswaran, Tamil politics simply cannot thrive without his ongoing wisdom and experience. If there's one thing as enduring as Wigneswaran's career, it's his belief that his guidance is essential to the political landscape.

As leader of the Tamil People's National Alliance, Wigneswaran emphasized that the party's primary goal is to protect Tamil nationalism and secure the rights of the Tamil people. He noted that the party has been blending the wisdom of experienced leaders (such as himself) with the "boundless energy"

of younger members to advance their political agenda. He proudly reminded the public that in the last parliamentary election, voters placed their trust in him, sending him to Parliament.

Now, at the age of 84, Wigneswaran believes it's time for the "old guard" (himself included) to step aside and create space for younger, dynamic members of the party. He urged other senior politicians to follow his lead by mentoring the next generation. He plans to remain active within the Tamil People's National Alliance and continue to guide younger candidates.

So, at the tender age of 84, Wigneswaran is passing the torch to the next generation—but not without making sure everyone knows he's still holding on to a part of it.

AUNT AND NEPHEWS

Translated from the original
Tamil short story *Marumakkal*
Thaayam (மருமக்கள் தாயம்)
by **S.L.M. Hanifa**

Translated by:
Dr. S.Sivasegaram

The sun was hiding away, and the sky cloudy and gloomy. The village had gone quiet. Even the crows that rest by the riverside did not caw. Where have the sparrows and the mynah birds that seek shelter in the cashew and manjona (morinda) trees gone?

"Baa... Baa...", auntie transformed her left palm into a sloping roof for her forehead and lovingly summoned the brown cock and the speckled hen. The pair ran up speedily and entered the cage. She placed the mixture of squeezed scraped coconut and bran inside the cage

and shut it with a little plank and stood up. Her hands propped up her waist and helped her to stand up.

"Looks like there's some smoke by the riverside," she mumbled and rubbed her eyes. "It's true. The village is alight!" She realised what was happening. Excitedly, she dragged her paralysed left leg and entered the hut. She could not see anything. "Where did I keep the damned matchbox?" Her hand found it as she fumbled through. The 'fireling' that was entrapped in the matchbox seated itself on the 'cup lamp'.

There was hardly anyone in the village who did not know auntie. She had many names such as gardener auntie, chit-bond auntie and pottery auntie. If there was a nickname that ends with auntie, it certainly refers to this auntie also known as Meeralebbe Avvaa Ummaa. All these names belonged to auntie alone in the village and represented bonds that had struck root and spread wide.

When the sun had risen barely two degrees over the eastern horizon, she would enter the village with the help of her stick. Manoeuvring her bowed legs, she will get in and out of





every house in the village. She will go along Vembukkaarande Road, turn at the Paalaiyadi junction, get on to Marungaikkeni Road and walk along Union Road and enter the garden.

It was the same routine today as well. She had gone a full round through the village without missing a single house. Her situation was not bad: she had nearly seven measures of rice. Besides they had issued relief this week, raw broken rice bits in the name of rice. "No curry will go with this broken rice bits. If I add a piece of dried fish to some thiraay leaves and stir fry, I may be able to eat two morsels."

She poured the rice into the pot and started to boil water for the tea. It was then that the sound penetrated her ears. 'Rat-tat-tat-tat-tat-tat-tat-tat-ta.'

"It was really the sound of the boys firing their guns. The trouble that these kafirs make... As if that is not enough our god-forbidden kids too have joined in."

"Boom! Bang!"

"Oh my god! The bomb probably has dropped inside the garden." Both her ears were ringing.

The cock and the hen sobbed as they sat back inside the cage.

"Even last night the boys came draped with weapons. Even after getting used to seeing it, my liver felt scorched."

"What is the matter son? It looks as if the fighting has started?" she asked and Buhari clapped his hands and laughed, "Phoo! Is this a battle? It will be all over in two hours!"

"He must have had something in his mind when he laughed. Real man-eaters."

"They usually leave their guns inside this hut and go into the village with one or two weapons. I was suspicious when they took all the weapons with them last night." Auntie

poured some sugar on her palm, touched the sugar carefully with her outstretched tongue, widened her lower lip, and tapped the upper gums with the sugar and as she sipped the tea sweetened by that sugar. "Boom! Bang!" Sand flung on her face.

"Oh Lord Mohideen!" auntie screamed. Her body shuddered in fear.

Auntie could not notice anything and she did not realise that the sari that she had wrapped over her skirt had fallen off. She left everything as it was, and she came out and looked, stick in hand and dragging her paralysed leg. The airship in the sky going round and round the village took a nosedive and it seemed that it would fall on the garden. Frightened, auntie glued herself to the manjona tree.

"Bang... Boom!"

"The airship is dropping bombs. The village will not be spared."

"Rat-tat-tat-tat-tat-tat-tat-ta."

"It seems that the boys are shooting as well."

When auntie was a young girl, she has seen airships drop bombs in Kalkudah. "The Japanese came in rows of airships. The ship belonging to the queen's country sank off Kalkudah." Old memories came to auntie's mind with blasts of sound from the AK 47s, and passed as flashes of lightning. It was then that she realised what was going on. "There was not a soul around in the colony," and a pestle started to pound within her chest.

"I did not hear the call for prayer from the mosque. Is Allah's mosque too in trouble? Oh Rahman, what harm has befallen this world?" auntie sighed.

"Gardener auntie, run along... The army folk have arrived... Everyone is going into the mosque." The sound that came floating in the air bit her ear. She did not feel comfortable to leave her hut.

"The pot of rice, the can of coins, sugar, tea, pots and pans and even the brown cock will be taken away." They comprised auntie's wealth.

"The Tamil riot a few years ago also started in this fashion. I left behind all my belongings and in the end they cleaned off everything, including the pot for making tea. Because of the accursed scoundrels I have no way of dying in peace in one place." Bitterness filled her.

She got into action. She tilted the pot and poured a coconut shell full of water on to the stove that she lit a while ago and put out the fire in one go. Smoke rose from the extinguished fire and covered auntie's face. She rubbed her eyes and closed the thatched door shut. "Let Allah take care." With sad disgust rising from the bottom of her heart, and leaving everything in the charge of Allah who created all, she stepped past the barbed wire fence. It was only as she stepped on to the road that everything became clear to her.

Everyone was leaving with his or her little ones, carrying whatever one could grab hold of. "I have a bad leg and, if I do not have even this stick, I am finished." Sighing, she walked as fast as she could.

"It has gone dark..." Auntie's eyesight was a little weak.

"Bang... Boom!" It was like a thunderbolt close to auntie who was limping on. The shock made the stick jump off her hand. "Allah, hei... ii" Auntie's legs tripped and she fell face flat on the road. Fortunately she had not hurt her



head. There was a burning sensation from the elbows and the knees that had scraped on the road.

The whole village went past auntie. Not one took a look at her. When she regained consciousness, she could hear the sound of the odd person passing along the road.

"Did I trip when I was passing Moulana vaappaa?" Her heart responded, "Yes! Yes!" Auntie looked up. The white walls of Moulana vaappaa's house shed light on her eyes. "I told Moulana vaappaa long ago of the might of the state and that is why he has left the village with his family. It is because blessed ones like him have left that the village is in this state". She hailed Moulana vaappaa in her mind.

"Son! Who is it vaappaa that is passing?" A figure with a sack on its shoulder passed half running and half walking past auntie.

"Mammalivaa... son Mammalivaa... son, I am gardener auntie. Please give me a hand, vaappaa,

you blessed one..."

"Is not Mammalivaa's house adjoining Moulana vaappaa's? There is not a sound," the mind wondered. "Child, Rosaammaa, will not you at least give me a hand... Child, I too am a creation of Allah. Why is everybody abandoning me?" Auntie started to moan and sob. She transferred her entire strength to her hands and managed to sit up on the road.

She heard the clanging of the bells of a bullock cart past Paalaiyadi junction. "Thambi, who is it vaappaa? Thambi I am gardener auntie. Can you take me too on the cart, son?"

In that area, only Ahmed Lebbe had a cart with a pair of bullocks. Auntie was familiar with the two animals.

"Son, don't both your bulls graze in my garden. Why isn't even one of you children taking a look at me?"

"Allah! Will I suffer this plight if I had my

son? During the last riots someone had kidnapped him, the boy who went to fish at Puliyaithurai. Even if my son was stupid Allah, why are you torturing this soul?" Desperation overcame auntie. No one seemed to take any notice of her.

"Ungrateful creatures. Even a dog would have looked back for all this sound."

"How many times would I have quenched the fire in their bellies by bringing down bunches of young coconut. In the end, there is not one person to lift me by my hand..."

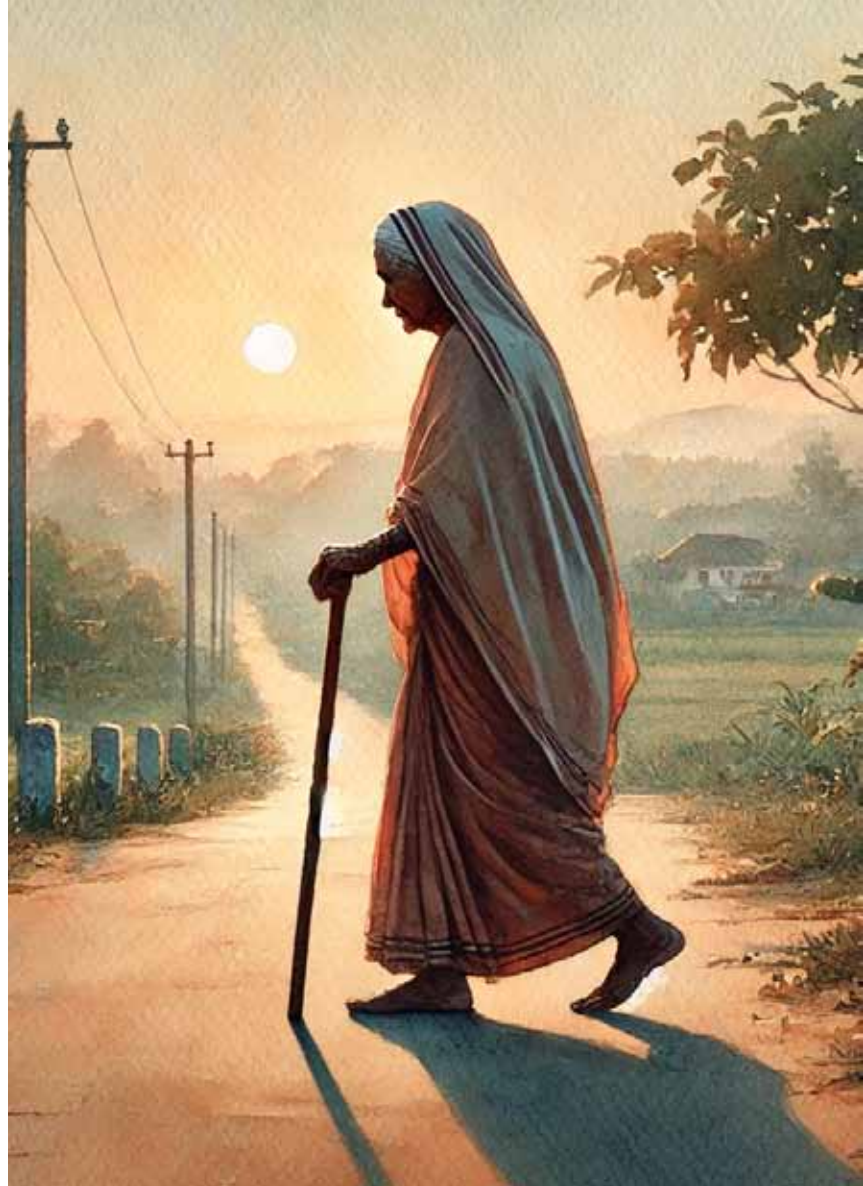
"The kafirs of Karuvaakkeni are a lot better than them. If Thambaiyah would only come this way, he would lend me his hand."

"Our folks have got used to opposing the might of the state. Eaters of haraam."

"All this is Allah's angry look..." Auntie, while seated on the road, swung her hands in search of the stick. Her watering eyes turned cloudy. "My garden will not survive this trouble. It was like this during the last riot too. The haraangkuttis of Karuvaakkeni set the hut alight."

"I was able to rebuild the hut with the relief money that the AGA gave me. How long is it since this trouble started and how long will it be before it ends?"

"This is not a world that is to be any good... It is one to be damned." Auntie struggled with her thoughts. The village quietened and turned mum like a snake that was struck down.



Auntie's tummy started to grumble. There was nothing inside. Hunger and thirst... It seemed that fear and confusion chasing each other would gobble her up. Hunger as fierce as fire... "The piece of dried fish and manioc that I bought from Umarkkutti's shop. I could have made a gravy, cooked rice and eaten by now," auntie savoured the saliva that welled in her mouth.

Far away, from the direction of Karuvaakkeni, a vehicle was speeding along. The glare hurt auntie's eyes. "Really it is the jeep of our boys that is coming. How often have I made pots and pots of tea for them? Perhaps, they will somehow stop and give me a hand."

Auntie tightened her skirt. The vehicle that speeded towards auntie took no notice of her and vanished in the direction of Kinnaiyadiththurai.

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