



Farewell to Dr. Raviraj: The Hands That Saved Jaffna

03

Editorial

06

Leptospirosis Identified
as Cause of Fatal Fever
in Jaffna

11

Exclusive Interview
with Jaffna's Renowned
Surgeon Dr. S. Raviraj

22

Tamil Nationalist
Leaders: United by Defeat,
Divided by Everything Else

24

MP's Ego Check-Up Goes
Wrong: Jaffna Hospital
Prescribes Security at the
Door!

25

Governor Vethanayagan
Calls for Release of
Lands Under Military
Control

27

LTTE Co-founder
Ragavan Speaks:
Exclusive Interview
– Part 3

38

“Nathaswara Osaiyile”:
An ancient art form that
defines a people

54

Dharma, Justice and
Human Rights

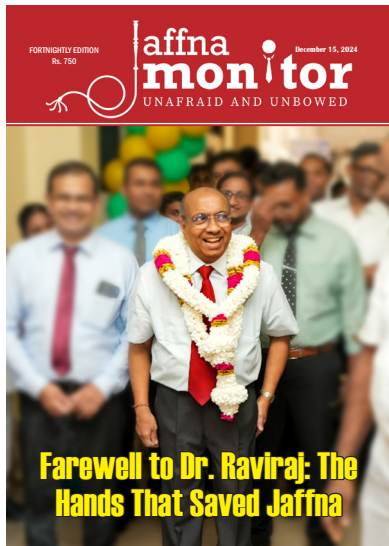
63

Tamil Leaders Criticize
MP Selvaraj's Stance
on Northern-Eastern
Merger

65

Story - The Hunt

A Legacy Etched in Courage: Farewell to Dr. S. Raviraj



Jaffna bids farewell to one of its most cherished and transformative figures, Dr. S. Raviraj, fondly called Iya by his students and colleagues. After dedicating over 40 years of unparalleled service to the people of Jaffna, Dr. Raviraj has retired, leaving behind a legacy that will inspire generations to come.

At a time when the northern region of Sri Lanka was engulfed in war and despair, many professionals sought refuge in prosperous countries. Yet, Dr. Raviraj charted a different course. Armed with surgical expertise honed in Singapore and Australia, he returned to the conflict-ravaged land he called home, trading the promise of a lucrative career abroad for the modest remuneration and challenges of rebuilding a shattered medical system in Jaffna.

The transformative impact of Dr. Raviraj's return to Jaffna cannot be overstated. Doctors across the region recount his visionary leadership in reorganizing and rebuilding the local healthcare system during its darkest days. His influence was profound as he inspired countless young doctors to pursue careers in surgery.

As Dr. Sutharshan Vengadasalam, a fellow surgeon at the Jaffna Teaching Hospital, poignantly remarked during Dr. Raviraj's farewell, "You can call any doctor with the suffix Iya, but if you say just Iya, it means Raviraj Iya alone." Dr. Sutharshan then shared a story that perfectly illustrates Dr. Raviraj's unparalleled influence.

During interviews for MD studies, a young and exceptionally qualified doctor, who could have easily pursued a specialized field like vascular surgery, opted instead for general surgery. Curious about this unusual choice, Dr. Sutharshan asked for an explanation. To his astonishment, the doctor replied, "I want to be a general surgeon like Iya."

Dr. Raviraj's career was forged in the crucible of peril, his resilience tested against the backdrop of war's savagery. Among the countless horrors he endured, one event remains etched in Jaffna's collective memory as a wound that refuses to heal—the 1987 Jaffna Hospital Massacre. Over 70 innocent lives were extinguished in cold blood by the Indian Peace Keeping Forces (IPKF), their heinous actions sparing neither renowned doctors nor the defenseless. Miraculously, Dr. Raviraj survived that harrowing ordeal, bearing witness to a chapter so dark it defies comprehension.

And yet, decades later, India—a nation draped in the sanctimonious cloak of Gandhian values—has neither apologized nor acknowledged its complicity in this atrocity. No gestures of remorse, no acts of contrition. Not even a whisper of accountability for the unspeakable carnage unleashed on a hospital.

Dr. Sivapathasundaram, a highly respected Consultant Paediatrician renowned for his unwavering dedication to saving lives—including one within my own family—was among the many who met a tragic and brutal end at the hands of the Indian Peace Keeping Force during that horrific carnage. He was last seen in the hospital corridors, walking alongside three nurses, their hands raised in surrender as they pleaded, "We are innocent doctors and nurses. Please don't kill us." Despite their desperate appeals for

mercy, Dr. Sivapathasundaram was executed in cold blood while the nurses sustained severe injuries at the hands of a force claiming to be peacekeepers

The carnage reached its vile crescendo when a courageous lady doctor, the daughter of a prominent journalist, dared to confront an Indian Army officer in one of the hospital wards. She laid bare the horrifying reality unfolding around them, appealing to a shred of humanity in a force that had long forsaken it. It was only then, under the weight of her brave defiance, that the massacre was reluctantly subdued.

What followed was even more grotesque: all the bodies of those murdered by the IPKF—patients, doctors, nurses—were unceremoniously gathered and burned. Not a shred of dignity, not a semblance of last rites, was afforded to the victims.

Apologists for this atrocity may argue that the LTTE fired upon the IPKF, triggering the massacre. Enough of these justifications. From its inception, the LTTE has operated under a leadership with no regard for sanctity—neither of life nor of public spaces. For Prabhakaran, every inch towards Tamil Eelam was worth any sacrifice, civilian or otherwise. But how does that justify the conduct of an army representing a nation that prides itself on the legacy of non-violence? How does a force

supposedly driven by Gandhian ideals descend to such barbarity, staining its soul with innocent blood?

In private conversations with doctors who endured that harrowing chapter, a brutal truth surfaces: India cannot expunge the indelible stains of its past through silence. If it seeks absolution, it must act—not with perfunctory gestures but with acts of restitution commensurate with the enormity of its culpability. A meaningful initiative could be the construction of a state-of-the-art 12-story clinical ward complex for the Jaffna Teaching Hospital, an ambitious project estimated at 1.7 billion Sri Lankan rupees.

While incapable of restoring the irreplaceable lives annihilated, such an endeavor could serve as a catalyst for reconciliation and a step towards assuaging the collective wounds. In the absence of tangible action, India's muteness remains a piercing indictment of its moral dereliction.

As we bid farewell to a towering figure like Dr. Raviraj, let us not only honor his legacy but also strive for a future where compassion triumphs over conflict and healing becomes the foundation of reconciliation.

கணியன் பூங்குன்றன்
Kaniyan Pungundran
Editor-Jaffna Monitor

For Donations:

Full Name	: JAFFNA MONITOR PUBLICATIONS
Bank Name	: National Development Bank PLC
Branch Name and Address	: No.30, KKS Road, Chunnakam, Jaffna
Account Number	: 111000221437
SWIFT Code	: NDBSLKLX
Bank Address	: No.40, Nawam Mawatha, Colombo 2

Need more information?

Call or WhatsApp us at : **+94715418220**
Email us at : **hellojaffnamonitor@gmail.com**

Leptospirosis Identified as Cause of Fatal Fever in Jaffna

BY:

Our Reporter

The fever outbreak in Jaffna, which has claimed seven lives to date, has been identified as Leptospirosis, commonly referred to as Rat Fever, according to the Epidemiology Unit of the Ministry of Health.

The victims, aged between 20 and 65, reportedly suffered from severe fever and respiratory complications. Blood samples sent to Colombo for detailed examination

confirmed the presence of *Leptospira* bacteria.

Addressing the media, Jaffna Hospital Director Dr. Sathyamoorthy emphasized the importance of prompt medical intervention for individuals exhibiting symptoms such as high fever, muscle pain, and difficulty breathing. He reassured the public that hospital authorities are taking all necessary steps to manage and contain the outbreak.



Leptospirosis, a bacterial infection transmitted through water contaminated with the urine of infected animals, often peaks during the rainy season. The Ministry of Health urges the public to take preventive measures, including avoiding stagnant water, maintaining proper hygiene, and seeking medical advice if symptoms appear.

Meanwhile, the Health Promotion Bureau has launched an investigation into the circumstances surrounding the disease's spread. Dr. Kumudu Weerakoon from the Epidemiology Unit stated that authorities are closely monitoring the situation and implementing preventive measures to limit further infections.

A team of medical specialists from the Epidemiology Division of the Ministry of Health in Colombo visited Jaffna on December 12 to assess ground conditions. They conducted investigative activities and provided guidance on managing the outbreak.

The team, led by Dr. Praba Abeykoon, first visited the Jaffna Teaching Hospital, where they examined patients admitted to the emergency unit with fever symptoms and conducted on-site investigations. They also held discussions with Dr. T. Sathiyamoorthy, Director of the Jaffna Teaching Hospital, and Dr. T. Peranandarajah, who is a General Physician, to comprehensively evaluate the current situation.

Additionally, the specialists visited the Point Pedro Base Hospital, which has admitted many patients with Leptospirosis, to assess the conditions there. During their visit, they engaged with the hospital's medical officers, examined patients receiving treatment, and provided expert advice.

The team also conducted field visits to areas where infections have been reported to gather further insights and conduct in-depth investigations.

Raveendran, the son of a leptospirosis victim, told Jaffna Monitor: "After the floods

What You Need to Know About Rat Fever (Leptospirosis)



What is Rat Fever?

Rat Fever, scientifically known as Leptospirosis, is a bacterial infection caused by the *Leptospira* bacteria. It is commonly transmitted through water or soil contaminated with the urine of infected animals, including rodents, livestock, and domestic pets.

How Does It Spread?

Leptospirosis spreads when individuals come into direct contact with:

- **Contaminated Water:** Swimming, wading, or bathing in floodwaters or stagnant pools contaminated by animal urine.
- **Contaminated Soil:** Handling soil or plants that may have been exposed to infected urine.
- **Infected Animals:** Handling infected or dead animals without proper protection.
- **Through Cuts or Mucous Membranes:** The bacteria can enter the body through cuts, abrasions, or mucous membranes (eyes, nose, or mouth).

Symptoms to Watch For

- High fever
- Severe headaches
- Muscle pain (particularly in calves and lower back)
- Redness in the eyes
- Vomiting and diarrhea
- Jaundice (yellowing of the skin and eyes)
- Difficulty breathing or chest pain in severe cases

If untreated, Leptospirosis can lead to kidney or liver damage, meningitis, respiratory distress, or even death.

Who is at Risk?

- Farmers
- Fishermen
- People exposed to floodwaters
- Animal handlers
- Individuals with poor rodent control in their surroundings

How Can You Prevent It?

- Avoid contact with stagnant water and floodwaters.
- Wear protective clothing, gloves, and boots when handling potentially contaminated water or soil.
- Keep wounds and cuts covered with waterproof bandages.
- Store food and waste securely to prevent rodent infestations.
- Boil water or use water purification methods before drinking.
- Avoid handling dead or infected animals without protection.

In endemic areas, preventive medication may be advisable. Contact your local health authorities for more information.

How Is It Treated?

Leptospirosis can be effectively treated with antibiotics if diagnosed early. Seek medical attention immediately if symptoms occur after potential exposure.

Why is Leptospirosis famously called "Rat Fever"? Are rats the real villains here?

The nickname "Rat Fever" sticks because rats are the primary culprits in spreading the *Leptospira* bacteria. These sneaky rodents carry the bacteria in their urine, contaminating water, soil, and sometimes even food. Humans, unfortunately, get caught in the crossfire when they wade into floodwaters, handle soil, or even drink untreated water unknowingly laced with this bacterial hitchhiker.

But are rats the only villains? Not really! While they're the poster creatures for the disease, other animals like cattle, dogs, and pigs can also play a role. However, because rats are so ubiquitous, particularly in urban and flood-prone areas, they've taken the spotlight in the "Rat Fever" story.



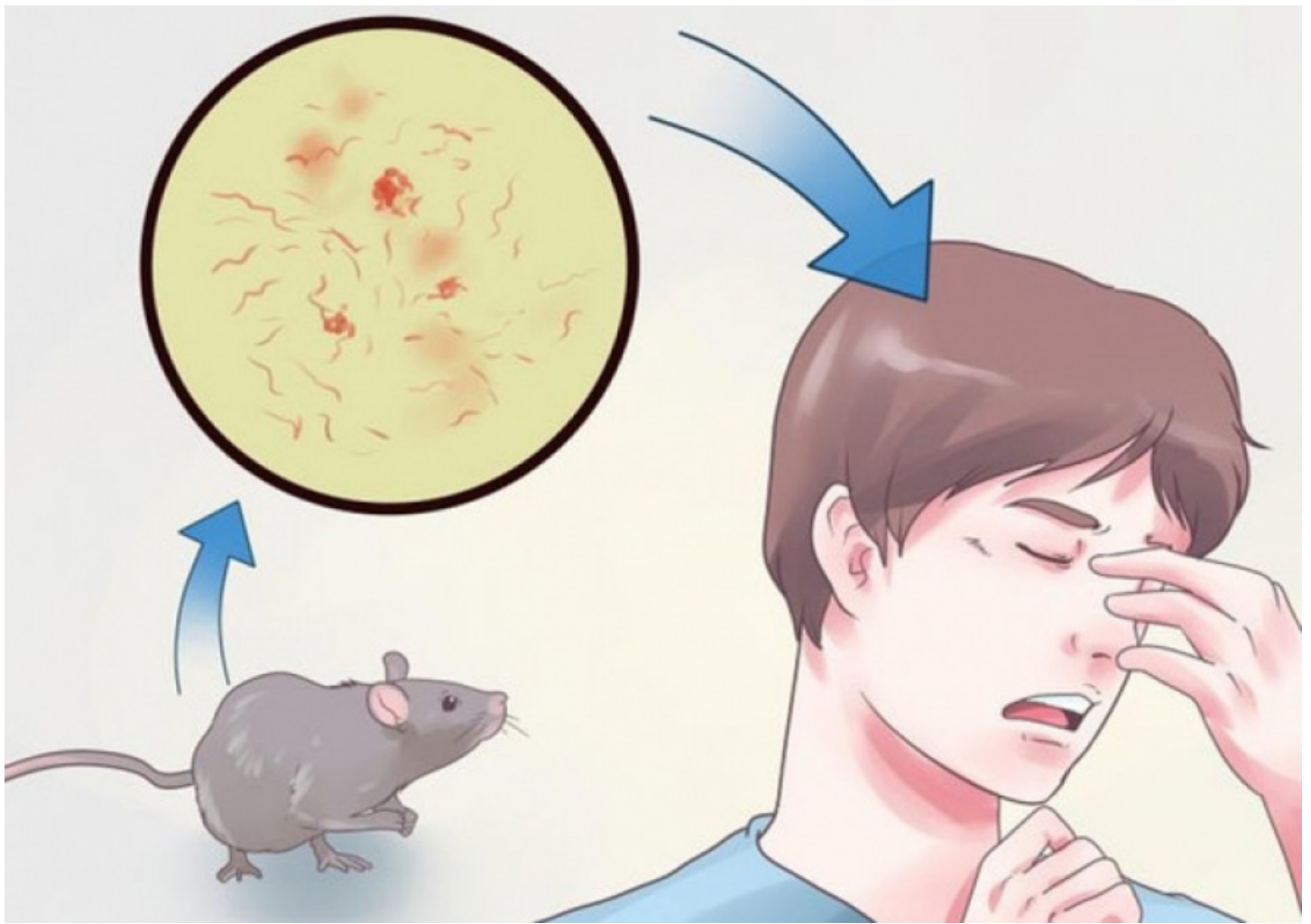
caused by Cyclone Pengal, our house in the Vadamarachchi region was partially submerged. Soon after the floodwaters receded, my father began feeling unwell. Initially, it seemed like a regular fever, but he later developed a high fever, chills, and severe body pain. When the symptoms persisted and his condition worsened, we took him to the local clinic. The doctors prescribed antibiotics, but his condition deteriorated rapidly. By the time we rushed him to the Point Pedro Base Hospital, it was too late," he recounted.

Health authorities are continuing their efforts to raise awareness about the disease while ensuring adequate medical support in affected areas. Residents are encouraged to remain vigilant and comply with health guidelines to curb the spread of the illness.

Specialist Highlights Preventive Measures for Leptospirosis

Dr. Pirasath Selladurai, a Specialist Physician in Internal Medicine at the Base Hospital in Manthikai, where a significant number of Leptospirosis (rat fever) patients are currently admitted, has shared crucial preventive measures to address the ongoing outbreak in Jaffna. In a social media post, Dr. Selladurai emphasized the importance of community awareness and individual precautions in combating the spread of the disease.





Leptospirosis, a bacterial infection commonly transmitted through water contaminated by animal urine, can lead to severe symptoms, including high fever and respiratory complications. Dr. Pirasath Selladurai outlined the following preventive measures to reduce the risk of infection:

Avoid Contaminated Water: Refrain from swimming, wading, or bathing in potentially contaminated water, especially after heavy rainfall, floods, or hurricanes. Do not ingest floodwater under any circumstances.

Treat Drinking Water: Ensure drinking water is safe by boiling it or using approved chemical treatments.

Protect Open Wounds: Cover any cuts or abrasions on the skin with waterproof bandages to prevent exposure to contaminated water.

Use Protective Gear: Wear waterproof

clothing, gloves, and closed shoes or boots when handling water or soil that might be contaminated.

Control Rodents: Store food, water, and waste in sealed containers to deter rodents. Use traps to manage their population.

Avoid Direct Contact with Infected Animals:

Do not handle dead animals directly, and wash hands thoroughly if contact occurs.

Limit interactions with animals that could potentially carry the disease.

Consider Preventive Medication: In areas where Leptospirosis is endemic, consult healthcare professionals about prophylactic medication.

Dr. Selladurai also encouraged residents to seek guidance from local Medical Officers of Health (MOH) or Public Health Inspectors (PHI) for additional information and support.



Commitment is Everything: Exclusive Interview with Jaffna's Renowned Surgeon Dr. S. Raviraj

BY:
**Our Special
Correspondent**

Jaffna's household surgeon, Dr. S. Raviraj, recently retired after over 40 years of dedicated service to the region. In many ways, he is a true hero to the people of Jaffna and an inspiration to his fellow doctors. During one of the darkest periods in Sri Lanka's history, as the civil war raged and uncertainty forced many to leave Jaffna in search of safety and stability, Dr. Raviraj made the extraordinary decision to return to Jaffna after completing his MD abroad, sacrificing



personal wealth and comfort. His unwavering commitment to serving the people of Jaffna during such immense challenges has left an indelible mark on the region's healthcare system.

With over 25 years as a surgeon and 40 years of dedicated service in Jaffna, Dr. Raviraj has witnessed and endured the horrors of war, including the infamous Jaffna Hospital massacre by the Indian Peacekeeping Force (IPKF), from which he miraculously escaped.

Throughout his career, he has been instrumental in transforming the medical landscape of Jaffna, earning widespread recognition as the driving force behind the region's modern surgical system.

Dr. Raviraj's contributions extend far beyond his role as a physician and surgeon. He has mentored and trained hundreds of surgeons, physicians, and healthcare professionals, many of whom now serve across Sri Lanka and internationally. Data shows that the number

of doctors in Jaffna pursuing surgery for their MD increased significantly after Dr. Raviraj returned to Jaffna as a surgeon. His legacy is such that in almost every family in Jaffna, at least one member has been treated by him.

He also served as the Director of Jaffna Hospital during one of its most critical periods, from 2005 to 2012. His leadership during crises was unparalleled, exemplified by his selfless act of personally delivering food to patients during a devastating flood, even as human waste flowed through the inundated hospital premises. Such acts of dedication and compassion have cemented his status as a true hero in the eyes of the people.

This is our exclusive interview with Dr. Raviraj.

Your decision to return to Jaffna after completing your MS in Surgery and overseas training is widely regarded as an act of selflessness, particularly

as it occurred during a time when the war was at its peak and uncertainty drove many professionals to leave the region in search of safety and stability. What inspired you to make such a courageous choice during such a turbulent period?

It is a well-established and mandatory path for doctors to pursue advanced training overseas as part of their postgraduate education. After earning my MS in Surgery around 2000, I embarked on this journey, undergoing training in Australia and Singapore. However, my commitment to returning to Jaffna and serving my people remained unwavering. War or no war, Sri Lanka is my birthplace, and regardless of the challenges—come hell or high water—I was determined to return and contribute to the place and people who shaped me.

You were the first surgical registrar produced by the Jaffna Medical Faculty. Could you tell me about your medical student days?

I entered the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Jaffna in 1979 as a member of the second batch of students. I studied surgery under Prof. Karunainathan, Prof. Vetpillai, and Prof. Sriskanthavarman; medicine under Dr. Mrs. Ganeshamoorthy, Dr. Sriharan, Dr. Nageshwaran, and Dr. Ranja Thayalan; obstetrics and gynecology under Prof. Sivasooriya and Prof. Thayalasekaran; and pediatrics under Prof. Ramadas and Dr. Vamadevan. I remain forever grateful to my teachers. I graduated in 1984.

In 1985, I completed my internship at Jaffna Teaching Hospital, working under Surgeon Dr.

Ponnambalam and Physician Dr. James, both of whom were exceptional mentors and guides. Dr. Ponnambalam, in particular, nurtured my profound interest in surgery and was one of the key reasons I chose surgery and eventually became a surgeon.

After completing my internship, I was offered a post-internship opportunity to work under Professor A. H. Sheriffdeen in Colombo, a highly skilled and renowned surgeon. He selected me to work as a departmental registrar, a position that allowed professors to personally choose one or two doctors for specialized training in their departments—a role that no longer exists today.

Professor Sheriffdeen invited me to Colombo, but at the time, Jaffna Teaching Hospital was grappling with a severe staff shortage. Dr. Nachinarkiniyan, the Director of Jaffna Hospital, expressed his concerns, saying, "If all of you leave, we won't be able to manage the hospital." Additionally, my mentor, Dr. Ganesaratnam, whom I deeply respected, strongly wished for me to remain in Jaffna. As a result, I decided to stay, where I worked as a Senior House Officer (SHO) for six years.

After passing the MD Part 1 exam, I was again offered the opportunity to work as a registrar under Professor N. Jayasekara. However, during this time, Dr. Kanesaratnam, an eminent surgeon and my mentor, was working alone at Jaffna Teaching Hospital. He was managing four units and eight wards single-handedly. He personally requested me to return to Jaffna, stating that my assistance would be invaluable. He even reached out to the postgraduate institution to facilitate this transition. I could not refuse his invitation.

I am also deeply thankful to Dr. Ganesaratnam for another reason. Traveling to Colombo during that period was extremely challenging.



When I first attempted the MD Part 1 exam, I needed to travel to Colombo to take the test, but a few times, I couldn't make it past Elephant Pass due to the war. During that time, Dr. Ganesaratnam advised me and a few other candidates working under him to stay in Colombo to complete the exam. Thanks to his support and encouragement, I finally stayed in Colombo, took the exam, and passed.

In those days, communication was extremely limited. There were no telephone facilities or telegrams, and the Northern Province was completely isolated. Even exam results were not immediately available; it often took about a month for us to receive the results after they were released.

The Jaffna Hospital massacre by the Indian Peacekeeping Forces occurred while you were working there. You were one of the survivors and lived to recount the tale of that horrendous act by the Indian troops. Could you share your experience?

Yes, it was an unimaginably harrowing experience. The massacre occurred on October 21, 1987, coinciding with Deepavali Day. On that tragic day, the Indian Peacekeeping Force, which had arrived with a mandate to assist us, turned their weapons against us in an act of sheer brutality.

All the doctors on duty that day were inside the hospital. The Indian military had surrounded the premises, trapping all healthcare workers within. When the Indian army stormed the hospital, they began shooting indiscriminately. Many lives were lost in the chaos, including my mentor, Dr. Sivapathasundaram, Dr. Ganesamoorthy, and several others.

Miraculously, a few of us survived. Just before the Indian army entered the hospital premises, Dr. Ponnambalam had gathered a group of us and

instructed us to prepare the operating theater. As we were on our way to the surgical theater, the gunfire erupted. Initially, hearing the loud explosions, I mistook them for the customary firecrackers of Deepavali. However, the relentless roar of bombs quickly shattered that illusion, revealing the horrifying reality.

Not just us, but others who were in the doctors' restrooms also managed to escape unharmed. Tragically, around 70 individuals—including doctors, nurses, patients, and staff—who were in the administrative building were mercilessly killed.

Was there an attack on the Indian army from within the hospital premises by the LTTE?

I cannot say for certain. We were told that the LTTE launched an attack from near the hospital wall, but no attacks originated from within the hospital buildings themselves. Even if that were true, it does not justify the horror that followed.

Was this incident one of the primary reasons for the mass exodus of doctors from Jaffna to foreign countries?

This incident may well have been a contributing factor, but the exodus of doctors from Jaffna had already begun before it unfolded. For years, doctors in the region were severely affected by the ongoing war, enduring relentless shelling, aerial bombings, and shootings. Many felt they could no longer ensure their own safety or that of their families, prompting them to leave.

The massacre at Jaffna Hospital only intensified the fear and uncertainty, further

compelling doctors to seek refuge and opportunities abroad. It wasn't just doctors—during that time, a significant portion of Jaffna's population sought to leave the region due to the overwhelming sense of insecurity and instability.

You are credited with shaping the modern Jaffna surgical system. What was the medical situation like when you returned to Jaffna after completing your foreign training?

I returned to Jaffna Hospital in 1997 as an acting surgeon and later became a permanent surgeon after completing my overseas training. At that time, while healthcare technology was advancing globally, less than 20% of that progress had reached Jaffna. We struggled with even the most basic necessities—something as simple as taking an X-ray was often a significant challenge.

The number of doctors was alarmingly low. At one point, there were only three or four medical specialists in Jaffna Hospital. Compare that to today, where we have over 100 specialists, and you can imagine the scale of hardship we faced back then. This situation was further exacerbated by the severe shortage of Senior House Officers (SHOs), House Officers (HOs), nurses, and other health workers.

The workload was immense, but it was also a time of resilience and perseverance. Despite these difficulties, we take immense pride in knowing that we laid the foundation for the healthcare system that Jaffna enjoys today.

What challenges did you face as a doctor and surgeon during wartime? We knew that Sri Lankan Tamils were very innovative during

the war, like running motorbikes on kerosene and using bicycle dynamos to watch TV.

The challenges we faced were immense and multifaceted. The biggest issue was the lack of basic diagnostic facilities in Jaffna. We couldn't perform critical blood tests locally. For this, we relied on the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), which transported blood samples to Colombo via their boats for analysis. This process naturally took time, often days. To this day, I am immensely grateful to the ICRC for their support during those difficult times.

One of the most significant challenges was the inability to conduct biopsies in Jaffna. For instance, if we suspected a woman had breast cancer, the standard procedure would be to take a sample of the lump (biopsy) and send it for pathological analysis to confirm the diagnosis.

Unfortunately, we had neither a pathologist nor the facilities to even prepare pathology slides in Jaffna. Without access to basic blood tests and biopsies, advanced diagnostic tools like MRI and CT scans were, of course, out of reach. When absolutely necessary, we had to send patients to Colombo for MRI or CT scans.

In cases where we strongly suspected cancers, such as breast or neck cancers, we had to make tough decisions. Given that biopsy results from Colombo could take a month or more to arrive, I could not risk delaying treatment when the cancer might spread further during that time. After thorough clinical examination and discussions with the patients, I performed surgeries based on clinical judgment alone, without waiting for biopsy results.

For example, I conducted approximately 60 breast cancer surgeries under such

circumstances. These surgeries were performed after explaining the risks and obtaining the patients' consent. Remarkably, out of those 60 cases, only one turned out to be tuberculosis of the breast instead of cancer, while all others were confirmed cancer cases when the biopsy results eventually arrived.

This experience underscored for me the irreplaceable value of clinical expertise and judgment, especially in resource-limited settings. While these actions may deviate from standard protocols, they were guided by humanity and the urgent need to save lives.

What other challenges and innovations did you experience?

One critical issue was the scarcity of anesthetic agents. We often relied on ketamine, which induces a state of dissociative anesthesia, allowing patients to undergo surgery with reduced consciousness and pain. This was far from ideal but was a practical solution given the circumstances.

We also faced severe shortages of oxygen. For non-critical surgeries, we used oxygen concentrators, which extract and concentrate oxygen from the ambient air. While not entirely reliable, this method allowed us to perform surgeries in dire situations.

Another challenge was the lack of appropriate surgical sutures. Different types of surgeries require specific sutures, but when we faced shortages, we adapted by using whatever was available, even if it was not ideal for that particular procedure.

Finally, blood scarcity was a constant issue. To overcome this, doctors, nurses, and other medical staff regularly donated blood to keep the supply going.

The data shows that after you returned to Jaffna as a surgeon, the number of doctors who pursued surgery as their postgraduate specialty increased significantly. When I spoke with some of them, they mentioned that they chose surgery because of your influence. How did you inspire them?

I simply encouraged them and instilled in them a strong sense of commitment to their work. There's something profound about the commitment we bring to our profession, and I believe I passed that on to my students. For instance, when we worked hard and managed to save a patient's life, the heartfelt gratitude from the patient was a surreal and deeply fulfilling experience. I wanted my students to feel that same sense of purpose and satisfaction.

At the same time, I was quite strict with my students when it came to their duties. I ensured they worked hard by setting an example myself. I firmly believe that leadership in the operating room begins with the surgeon. I encouraged them to immerse themselves in surgery by actively engaging with key foundational subjects like anatomy, pathology, and physiology.

Anatomy plays a critical role in surgery, so I made sure my students taught anatomy to medical undergraduates. Teaching reinforced their understanding and made them intimately familiar with the human body, which naturally sparked their interest in surgery. Similarly, I emphasized the importance of pathology and physiology, encouraging them to work in relevant wards to deepen their knowledge.



I also actively involved my students in surgeries, letting them assist and co-work with me. I didn't fully delegate surgeries to them but instead assigned them specific responsibilities within a procedure. This allowed them to feel a sense of ownership and active participation in the surgery. After thorough training, I entrusted them with intermediate and minor surgeries, which further bolstered their confidence and sense of belonging to the field of surgery.

Beyond the operating room, we arranged regular lecture sessions and discussion forums for our students. Despite the limited internet access at the time, we managed to connect with counterparts in Colombo for collaborative discussions. These efforts enriched their knowledge and broadened their exposure.

Today, many of my students are working

as surgeons and physicians, and I feel immense pride and happiness seeing their accomplishments.

Approximately how many of your students are surgeons and physicians now?

It's difficult to calculate precisely, but I can confidently say hundreds of them are practicing surgeons and physicians today.

The medical professionals we spoke to say you were instrumental in making the medical field in Jaffna more efficient. What did you actually do?

I believe my contribution was small—it has always been a team effort involving everyone. My role was to encourage and inspire those around me. Thankfully, I have been blessed with a certain wisdom, which I attribute to God. For me, sincerity, honesty, punctuality, and, above all, commitment are paramount.

I would especially like to emphasize the importance of commitment, as it forms the foundation for everything. When we lead with commitment—whether it's in our work, teaching, or patient care—it naturally inspires others to follow and respect us.

Why do you think there is a negative public perception of doctors and the medical field despite the vast majority of Jaffna doctors being committed and not money-minded?

This is a very complex and sensitive question, but I'll do my best to address it based on my observations. One of the primary reasons for

negative perceptions is people's expectations. When a patient visits a doctor, they often expect to be completely cured without any complications or setbacks. This is not something I blame them for, nor do I see it as a fault—it is simply human nature. However, I believe this tendency is slightly more pronounced in Sri Lankan Tamil society.

There is always a delicate balance between people's expectations and the services we provide. Even when we give 100% effort and dedication, there are situations that are beyond our control. Not all outcomes are within our power.

That said, I also acknowledge that mistakes have occurred on the part of some doctors, nurses, and medical staff. No one is perfect, and errors can happen in any field. To address this, we must strengthen our public relations and interactions with patients.

In my experience, 90% of patients' perception of their care depends on how they are treated—not just medically, but personally. Unfortunately, not all doctors excel in this area, and this can contribute to negative perceptions.

To overcome these challenges, we need to focus on building trust and empathy with patients. Effective communication, transparency, and a compassionate approach can go a long way in bridging the gap between expectations and reality. I believe that by doing so, we can ultimately reduce negative perceptions of the medical field.

Do you think, as some claim on social media, that Jaffna doctors are greedy or work purely for money?

I wouldn't agree with that claim. The reality is



that living solely on a government salary has become nearly impossible due to the soaring cost of living. Like everyone else, doctors also face financial challenges. As long as they earn money through government-approved private practices, there is nothing inherently wrong. Private practice, when conducted ethically and with a focus on the patient's well-being, is a legitimate way for doctors to support themselves.

That said, private practice must always be carried out responsibly, with integrity, and with the awareness of not imposing undue financial burdens on patients. If anyone were to misuse private practice, I would consider it a grave mistake. However, the majority of doctors operate with a strong conscience and dedication to their profession.

At the same time, I'd like to address the narratives on social media. Social media often tends to focus disproportionately on the negative aspects of the medical profession while neglecting the positive contributions of doctors. This one-sided portrayal shapes public perception and can create undue hostility toward medical professionals. I'm not asking social media users or content creators

to glorify us; I request that they present a balanced and truthful narrative, highlighting both the challenges and the progress in the field.

For example, when facilities at Chavakachcheri Hospital were closed, social media was quick to highlight the issue, which was constructive criticism and helped bring attention to the problem. However, now that the hospital's facilities have reopened and are functioning smoothly, there hasn't been the same level of acknowledgment or coverage of this positive development. This selective focus on negativity contributes to an unfair perception of the medical field.

Would this unwarranted criticism leveled upon doctors hurt genuine doctors who gave up the chance to have a lucrative life in foreign countries and chose to return to Sri Lanka?

Absolutely, such criticism can be deeply disheartening for dedicated doctors who have chosen to serve in Sri Lanka despite more lucrative opportunities abroad. Facing continuous harassment on social media, coupled with financial challenges and the recent economic turmoil, can lead these

professionals to reconsider their decision to stay.

In recent years, Sri Lanka has experienced a significant exodus of healthcare professionals. According to the Government Medical Officers' Association (GMOA), over 1,700 doctors have left the country in the past two years, primarily due to economic reasons. This migration is wider than doctors; nurses and other medical staff have also sought opportunities abroad, exacerbating staff shortages and straining the healthcare system.

Constructive criticism is essential for growth and improvement. However, persistent negative portrayals without acknowledgment of the challenges faced by medical professionals can be demoralizing.

You mentioned the challenges faced by the healthcare system. What steps are being taken to address these issues in the Northern Province?

I'm glad you asked. We are currently working towards building a robust and future-ready healthcare system in the Northern Province. Recently, we had a constructive discussion with the Governor of the Northern Province, Mr. Vethanayagan. He is a very cooperative and supportive leader, and he has promised to assist us in this endeavor. We are also in talks with the Ministry of Health to align our plans with national healthcare goals.

We aim to improve healthcare infrastructure and services across the Northern Province and set a benchmark for other provinces. We aspire to create a healthcare system that is efficient, accessible, and exemplary—a model for how healthcare can function across all regions of Sri Lanka.



We are still in the planning and discussion stages. However, I can confidently say that this initiative is a step towards transforming the Northern Province into a region where quality healthcare is a fundamental right, accessible to everyone, regardless of where they live.

You mentioned plans for developing the healthcare system in the Northern Province. What specific measures do you believe are necessary to ensure its success?

In my opinion, before focusing on constructing new buildings, we should prioritize ensuring that the existing buildings function at their full capacity. Currently, a few healthcare-related buildings in the Northern Province have been constructed but are not operating as intended. It's essential to thoroughly investigate why these facilities are underutilized or non-functional and take the necessary corrective actions.

For the future, it is not enough to simply build structures. Every new building must come equipped with the required workforce, equipment, and operational plans. Constructing buildings without considering these essential elements leads to wasted resources and inefficiency. A healthcare facility is only as effective as the people and tools within it.

Our focus should be on creating comprehensive and sustainable solutions, ensuring that each facility—whether new or existing—meets the healthcare needs of the population effectively. This approach will not only optimize resource utilization but also lay the foundation for a healthcare system that can truly serve as a model for other regions.

You mentioned the shortage of doctors in Sri Lanka. At the same time, millions of dollars are leaving the country as students pursue private medical education abroad due to the lack of private medical universities in Sri Lanka. Any attempt to establish private medical colleges here has faced significant opposition. What are your thoughts on this issue?

This is indeed a pressing issue. Sri Lanka should allow private medical colleges, provided they adhere to strict regulations and maintain the highest standards of education. There is no harm in offering private medical education locally. For instance, students who study international curriculums like the London A-Levels in Sri Lanka often find themselves excluded from the local university system. Why not provide them with the

opportunity to pursue medical education within the country instead of forcing them abroad?

The issue with some of the previous attempts to establish private medical universities in Sri Lanka was the lack of proper groundwork. To establish a legitimate medical university, it is essential to meet specific requirements, including:

Regulatory Approvals: Obtaining proper authorization from the University Grants Commission (UGC), Sri Lanka Medical Council (SLMC), and the Ministry of Health to ensure compliance with national and international standards.

Infrastructure and Resources: Building well-equipped facilities, including teaching hospitals, laboratories, and classrooms, and ensuring the availability of qualified faculty and support staff.

Quality Assurance: Implementing rigorous accreditation processes and maintaining consistent quality in education and training. The challenges faced by earlier initiatives stemmed from the failure to adhere to these principles. When basic standards are compromised, it inevitably leads to public mistrust and opposition.

To address the shortage of doctors, the government could also consider increasing the intake of students at existing medical faculties or establishing new public medical faculties. However, to curb the significant outflow of money from the country, allowing well-regulated private medical colleges is a logical and necessary step.

Tamil Nationalist Leaders: United by Defeat, Divided by Everything Else



BY:

Our Reporter

Faced with an unexpected blow dealt by the ruling NPP, which clinched 3 out of 6 parliamentary seats in the recently concluded Jaffna electoral district elections, Tamil nationalist leaders have launched a flurry of meetings aimed at uniting their fractured ranks—and perhaps, as skeptics put it, continuing their tradition of hoodwinking the Tamil people.

In the latest episode of this political drama, Sritharan and Gajendrakumar Ponnambalam sat down to discuss strategies for patching

up their differences and presenting a united front. The meeting, however, did not escape the watchful eyes of political commentators, who gleefully noted the irony as Sritharan had publicly lambasted Ponnambalam with some choice unflattering remarks just days before the polls.

Yet, in a display of classic political opportunism, the two leaders appear to have buried their hatchets—not in each other, surprisingly—but in the name of a "greater cause." Their newfound camaraderie, while raising eyebrows, seems to be less about principle and more about survival in a political landscape suddenly shaken by the NPP's success.

In a parallel effort, Gajendrakumar Ponnambalam recently met with Selvam Adaikalanathan, the leader of the Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Organization (EPRLF), in Kilinochchi to discuss future political strategies. Adaikalanathan, who scraped through to victory in the Vanni electoral district by a razor-thin margin, now holds the dubious distinction of being the MP with the fewest preferential votes in the last election—a title nobody's likely to envy.

According to sources, the two leaders reviewed a draft resolution prepared by the Tamil People's Council, which has been pitched as a potential roadmap for uniting Tamil nationalist forces. However, the question remains: what kind of "unity" are we talking about here?

Gajendrakumar Ponnambalam is willing to use the Tamil People's Council's draft resolution as a springboard for broader discussions with other Tamil political parties. Ponnambalam stressed the need for "collective action" to champion the rights and aspirations of the Tamil community—a sentiment that conveniently doubles as a survival strategy in the wake of recent electoral shake-ups.

Echoing these unity vibes (and likely their own political anxieties), Sivagnanam Sritharan and Selvam Adaikalanathan have also signaled their openness to dialogue. Sritharan, chairperson of the ITAK parliamentary group, put on his statesman hat to emphasize the importance of setting aside differences "for the greater good of the Tamil people." Meanwhile, Adaikalanathan, perhaps still reeling from his razor-thin victory in the Vanni district, talked up the need for consensus on shared political priorities to achieve "meaningful progress."

The recent parliamentary elections in Sri Lanka delivered a seismic jolt to Tamil nationalist parties, exposing their dwindling clout even in their long-standing stronghold—the Jaffna Peninsula, often regarded as the heartland of Tamil nationalism. In an outcome that few saw coming, the National People's Power (NPP), a predominantly Sinhala party that has made no secret of its disregard for the 13th Amendment, grabbed three of the six seats in Jaffna, leaving political observers in shock.

Adding to the drama, one seat was clinched by the polarizing figure of Dr. Aruchchuna Ramanathan, the doctor-turned-politician whose entry into the political arena has been as controversial as it has been surprising. This left Tamil nationalist parties clinging to just two seats: one held by Sivagnanam Sritharan of the Illankai Tamil Arasu Kachchi (ITAK) and the other by Tamil National People's Front (TNPF) leader Gajendrakumar Ponnambalam.

The election results have been nothing short of a wake-up call for Tamil nationalist leaders, a political observer noted to Jaffna Monitor. One commentator cheekily described their current actions as a desperate "survival dance." With their grip on the Tamil electorate slipping, these leaders are now frantically scrambling to save face, rework strategies, and cobble together alliances—doing whatever it takes to keep their political relevance afloat.

For voters, however, the spectacle of their leaders' newfound urgency is likely to evoke a mix of amusement and skepticism. Whether this "dance" will result in meaningful change or simply more theatrics remains to be seen. One thing is clear: the political landscape in Jaffna and other Tamil-speaking areas is shifting, and critics suggest that Tamil nationalism may no longer be the unchallenged force it once was.

MP's Ego Check-Up Goes Wrong: Jaffna Hospital Prescribes Security at the Door!



Dr. Thangamuthu Sathyamoorthy, Director of Jaffna Teaching Hospital, stated that if Member of Parliament Ramanathan Archchuna, widely regarded as an "unfit" MP lacking the emotional intelligence necessary to represent the people, attempts to disrupt the hospital's operations again, he will be stopped at the entrance by security personnel and handed over to the police. He made these remarks during a press briefing.

Elaborating further, Dr. Sathyamoorthy recounted the incident, saying, "During his recent show-up visit to Jaffna Teaching Hospital, MP Archchuna identified himself as a Member of Parliament and demanded that he be addressed as 'Sir.' When we firmly replied that we would not address him in such a manner, he threatened to have me removed from my position as Director of the hospital. He went further, claiming he would summon me to Parliament for questioning and even

suggested that I should flee the country. I told him, quite plainly, to do whatever the hell he can."

Dr. Sathyamoorthy emphasized that the hospital cannot allow disruptions caused by MP Archchuna or anyone else within its premises.

If MP Archchuna attempts to create any further disturbances inside the Jaffna Teaching Hospital, he will be stopped at the entrance by security officers and handed over to the police," Dr. Sathyamoorthy reiterated.

Meanwhile, another doctor, speaking to Jaffna Monitor on condition of anonymity, remarked with evident frustration, "Not only should he be stopped at the entrance and handed over to the police, but he should also be tied up and treated in a mental hospital.

Governor Vethanayagan Calls for Release of Lands Under Military Control



Northern Province Governor N. Vethanayagan has urged the release of lands still under the control of the security forces, emphasizing that addressing land-related grievances is critical for the welfare of the region. The Governor made these remarks during a recent meeting with Henry Donati, the First Secretary for Peacebuilding and Human Rights at the British High Commission, at the Northern Province Governor's Secretariat.

In a statement released by the Governor's office, Vethanayagan highlighted the ongoing challenges faced by the people of

the Northern Province. He pointed out that during the war, when people in the region were displaced, some of their lands were designated as protected areas under the Forest Department and the Department of Wildlife through gazette notifications. He noted that these actions have significantly disrupted livelihoods, particularly for farmers, and remain a pressing concern for the community.

Progress Amid Challenges

While acknowledging the existing challenges, the Governor highlighted some positive developments in the region. He commended

the reopening of a previously closed road in Valikamam North, which had been under military control for years, calling it a step in the right direction. However, he noted that many other roads and lands remain under military control, with public calls for their release continuing unabated.

Governor Vethanayagan also pointed out the removal of numerous checkpoints and roadblocks previously established by security forces. He described this as a significant measure that has improved mobility and bolstered public confidence.

Focus on Development and Investment

Highlighting economic prospects, the Governor revealed plans for an investors' conference next year to attract investment to the Northern Province. He praised the current government for fostering investor confidence and shared plans to expand the runway at Jaffna International Airport in Palaly, which he said would boost economic opportunities and generate jobs for local youth.



Support for Refugees

Addressing the plight of Sri Lankan Tamil refugees in Tamil Nadu, India, the Governor noted that approximately 100,000 refugees reside there. He assured that the government is prepared to extend livelihood and housing support to those who wish to return.

Infrastructure and Gratitude

Governor Vethanayagan also drew attention to the region's infrastructure gaps, particularly the poor condition of interior roads, and expressed hope that the government would address these issues during its tenure. Concluding the meeting, the Governor conveyed his gratitude to the British government for its past support to the Northern Province through UN agencies and various other initiatives, according to a press release from the Governor's office.

The Most Brutal Internal Killings Took Place in PLOTE: 'PLOTE's Killing Squad Began to Enjoy It, Asking, Is There No One Left to Kill?'

LTTE Co-Founder Ragavan

Part-3



BY:

**Our Special
Correspondent**

Chinniah Rajeshkumar, better known as Ragavan, co-founded the LTTE and played a pivotal role in its formative years alongside its leader, Prabhakaran. Disillusioned by rising extremism, internal power struggles, and the cult-like loyalty to Prabhakaran, Ragavan parted ways with the LTTE in April 1984 and relocated to London. Now a legal advisor and activist, he provides unique insights into Tamil nationalism and the LTTE's tumultuous history. In this exclusive Jaffna Monitor interview, Ragavan shares insider perspectives and reflections on the current political landscape. This is Part 3 of the series.



You and LTTE leader Prabhakaran were both involved in the infamous Pondy Bazaar shooting on May 19, 1982. Can you recount the events of that day and what led to this dramatic encounter?

The Pondy Bazaar shooting was closely tied to the tensions that arose after the People's Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE) split from the LTTE in 1979. Uma Maheswaran defected from the LTTE following rumors about his relationship with Urmila, which prompted him to establish PLOTE.

Is there any truth to the story about an alleged relationship between Urmila and Uma Maheswaran?

In 1979, a rumor suggested that Uma Maheswaran and Urmila were romantically involved, quickly spiraling into a major controversy. Anton Balasingham, who was in India at the time, attempted to defuse the situation by referencing Freud's theory of sexuality. He argued that having sexual desires is natural and not a sin. However, despite his efforts, Prabhakaran and others were unwilling to accept this perspective.

Initially, Balasingham tried to mediate, but he eventually aligned himself with Prabhakaran's stance—a pattern he maintained consistently until his death. In my opinion, this incident underscores the deeply entrenched misogynistic views and biases within the LTTE leadership and the organization as a whole.

Was there any actual basis for this rumor?

There was no concrete evidence, but individuals like Nagarajan Master speculated that Uma and Urmila's romantic involvement might have begun even before they joined the movement. The troubling aspect of this situation was that all the blame was placed squarely on Urmila. In our cultural context, it is often women who bear the brunt of such controversies.

This wasn't solely Prabhakaran's perspective; it reflected a deeper, male-centered patriarchal cultural bias. Consequently, Urmila was forced out of the organization, while Uma Maheswaran was allowed to remain as an ordinary member.

They conveniently overlooked Urmila's unwavering dedication. She undertook many daring tasks for the organization, operating covertly out of Colombo and accepting high-risk assignments. For instance, she printed the first public statement by the Tigers claiming responsibility for the assassination of Inspector Bastiampillai and others.

What happened after the split of the LTTE and the formation of PLOTE?

After the split, Uma Maheswaran managed to persuade some disillusioned LTTE members, who were dissatisfied with Prabhakaran's authoritarian leadership, to join him. Sundaram, a senior figure in the LTTE, also supported Uma Maheswaran, and together, they established PLOTE.

According to LTTE doctrine, anyone who left the organization to form a rival group was marked for elimination. This rigid and deeply undemocratic principle denied individuals the basic right to hold differing political views or create alternative organizations. As a result, Uma Maheswaran and the members of PLOTE became prime targets.

What was your stance at the time of the split?

When the split occurred, I initially supported Prabhakaran. However, after the split, Prabhakaran sought to consolidate full control over the LTTE and establish himself as its supreme leader. This shift raised concerns among some of us. Mano Master and I and others opposed this move, believing it contradicted the principles we stood for. In response, Prabhakaran made the decisive choice to leave the LTTE and chart his own path. Although I sympathized with him, I remained steadfast in my principles.

Where did Prabhakaran go after leaving the LTTE?

After leaving the LTTE, Prabhakaran joined TELO and began working under Thangathurai, acknowledging his sole leadership. Initially, Prabhakaran was the only one to join TELO. Later, he successfully persuaded several former LTTE members, including Seelan and Mathaya, to follow him into TELO. However, I chose not to join him at that time.

While Thangathurai retained ultimate authority, the former LTTE members who joined TELO at Prabhakaran's request operated under his command.

Thangathurai envisioned a structure where Prabhakaran would oversee the LTTE guards, functioning as a division commander, while ultimate leadership firmly remained with Thangathurai. Prabhakaran wholeheartedly accepted this arrangement, guided by his philosophy: "Either I lead, or I follow someone loyally." During this period, his loyalty to Thangathurai was unwavering.

Prabhakaran once remarked that Thangathurai had told him, "If anything happens to me, the future leadership must be collective."

Prabhakaran issued an unofficial death sentence, according to LTTE doctrine, on Uma Maheswaran for leaving the LTTE and forming a new organization. But Prabhakaran himself left the LTTE and joined TELO. Who would hold him accountable or sentence him to death?

(Laughs) If you truly understand Prabhakaran's mindset, this question wouldn't arise. When Prabhakaran made such moves, they were deemed acceptable; it was only considered wrong when others did the same.

Questioning him was simply out of the question. If accountability were to apply, he would have had to impose a death sentence on himself.

However, there was a rationale behind his actions—Prabhakaran only joined TELO after officially disbanding the LTTE. From his perspective, this allowed him to argue that TELO was the sole legitimate representative of the Tamil nationalist cause at that time.

There are rumors that Prabhakaran betrayed Kuttimani and Thangathurai to the Srilankan security forces. What's your take on that?

I don't agree with that at all. Prabhakaran's mindset was entirely different. While it was known as TELO, its core structure and network were essentially built on the LTTE's foundation. If Prabhakaran had betrayed Kuttimani and Thangathurai, it would have



been tantamount to betraying his own network. That's something he could never do. It goes against everything he stood for.

What happened after the arrest of Kuttimani and Thangathurai?

After Kuttimani and Thangathurai were arrested and detained by the security forces in April 1981, the leadership of TELO underwent a significant shift. Sri Sabaratnam, Prabhakaran, and Panth Anna—whose real name I've forgotten but whom we humorously nicknamed Panth Anna due to his flamboyant demeanor (பந்தா காட்டுதல்)—took

over as joint leaders and key decision-makers within TELO.

At that time, I chose not to join TELO immediately and instead remained in Chennai. Prabhakaran personally visited me there, passionately appealing for my support and urging me to join the organization. While I initially had my reservations, I always admired Prabhakaran's unwavering dedication to the national liberation struggle. It was solely for that reason that I decided to join hands with him and become part of TELO.

It's important to clarify that I joined TELO only after Kuttimani and Thangathurai were arrested. I was not part of Thangathurai's leadership during their tenure.

PLOTE leader' Puthiya Pathai' Sundaram's assassination was the first instance of fratricidal killing among Tamil militant groups. (Although internal killings of Kannadi Pathamanathan, Patkunam, and Micheal happened, this was the first time the LTTE killed a member of another militant organization) What exactly happened? Who killed Sundaram, and why?

On January 2, 1982, Sundaram (Sadasivam Sivasankaran) was assassinated at Chitra Press in Jaffna. It was Prabhakaran who made the decision and got approval from Sri Sabaratnam

and Panth . This plan was not known to all the members working under Prabhakaran's leadership within TELO. Prabhakaran's loyalists, Sellan and Pandithar, were selected to carry out the assassination.

By the time of his murder, Sundaram had become a prominent figure in the Tamil nationalist movement. He was the editor of Puthiya Pathai, a magazine that openly criticized the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) leadership, making him an influential and vocal critic.

In addition to his role as a critic, Sundaram had also established himself as a key military leader for PLOTE. Just days before his assassination, he led a daring and highly successful raid on Anaikoddai, which further elevated his reputation.

Prabhakaran perceived both Sundaram and the Anaikoddai operation as direct threats to the LTTE's political ambitions. To eliminate this perceived danger, he ordered Sundaram's assassination, marking the first instance of fratricidal violence among Tamil militant groups.

There were rumors that TULF leader Amirthalingam was indirectly involved in Sundaram's assassination. Some unconfirmed reports suggest that when a fellow TULF member complained about Sundaram's criticism of the TULF leadership, Amirthalingam allegedly responded, saying, "சுந்தரத்தை தம்பி பார்த்துக் கொள்வான்" (Translation: "Thambi [Prabhakaran] will take care of Sundaram.") Do you

believe this narrative?

I don't think so. While it's possible that Amirthalingam was angry about Sundaram's criticism of the TULF, I am not convinced that he would have made such a statement.

After the Pondy Bazaar shooting, Amirthalingam visited India and attempted to mediate between Prabhakaran and Umamaheswaran, urging them to resolve their differences amicably. However, Prabhakaran was adamant and outright rejected Amirthalingam's suggestion. In fact, he was furious with Amirthalingam and reportedly remarked, "If he supports Umamaheswaran, I'll put a bullet in his bald head."

While it's true that Prabhakaran had connections with Amirthalingam, it's equally true that Umamaheswaran also had ties with him. Before joining the LTTE, Umamaheswaran served as the secretary of the TULF Youth Wing in Colombo.

What were the repercussions of Suntharam's assassination?

Following Suntharam's assassination, PLOTE retaliated by killing known LTTE supporters Iraikumaran and Umaikumaran. Iraikumaran, though not an official member, was a supporter of the LTTE, while Umaikumaran had once been a member but had since left the organization. Iraikumaran, loosely affiliated with the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF), had little real involvement in militant activities—he merely ran a dairy farm. They were both from the same village and were friends. I heard that the PLOTE members visited their house and asked them to come with them for an inquiry, and both were shot. The rest is history.

Given his disciplined nature as fighters, how were Seelan (Charles Lucas Anthony) and Pandithar (Sinnathurai Raveenthiran) influenced to carry out Sundaram's assassination?

It's straightforward: Seelan was told that only one liberation movement—the LTTE—could lead the Tamil struggle. Believe me, in the early 1980s, the LTTE's political propaganda was focused less on the Sri Lankan government and more on rival groups like PLOTE. Demonstrating loyalty to Prabhakaran and the Tigers wasn't about fighting the military; it was about eliminating members of competing organizations, gathering intelligence on rival factions, and assassinating their members. In the 80s, they had 'political' classes for the new recruits, and the class was mainly about PLOTE, and the theme was why they should be eliminated.

How did you react to Sundaram's assassination? What was your state of mind?

Although I was unaware of the plan at the time, as a member of TELO, I still feel a sense of moral responsibility. This is a complex phenomenon to grapple with—being part of an authoritarian organization that carried out such heinous acts means that, even if one is not directly involved, membership itself confers a degree of accountability.

I was deeply unhappy about Sundaram's murder, recognizing that it could ignite a fratricidal conflict with PLOTE. However, I faced a profound dilemma: should I continue with the organization for the sake of the national liberation struggle, or should I leave?

Despite my unease, I cannot deny my moral responsibility as I chose to remain with the LTTE even after Sundaram's assassination.

This internal struggle weighed heavily on me, particularly as tensions began to surface between Prabhakaran and TELO. I came to believe that the LTTE needed to be re-established, as I felt TELO lacked the commitment and focus necessary for the national liberation cause.

In your view, what was the problem with TELO?

TELO lacked substance and serious dedication. In some ways, it functioned like a Varuthapadatha Valibar Sangam (a "Club of Carefree Youth"). Let me give you an example to explain why I say this. During a training session I conducted, I was deeply frustrated to see TELO leaders Sri Sabaratnam and Panth engrossed in a heated argument—not about strategy or the movement, but about whether Bharathiraja or Bhagyaraj was the better director. At one point, they passionately debated which movie was superior: Tik Tik Tik by Bharathiraja or Vidiyum Varai Kaathiru by Bhagyaraj.

What baffled me was that they spent hours on this trivial dispute, completely wasting valuable time. This lack of seriousness not only frustrated me but also the LTTE fighters aligned with TELO.

Meanwhile, tensions were simmering between Prabhakaran and Sri Sabaratnam. Although I wasn't privy to all the details, it was clear their relationship was strained. These tensions and TELO's lack of focus led to a breaking point. A couple of months before the Pandy Bazaar incident, Prabhakaran and a few of us decided to part ways with TELO. We left it behind to

re-establish the LTTE and reignite our mission with renewed purpose.

What happened after re-establishing the LTTE? And what events led up to the Pandya Bazaar shooting incident?

After leaving TELO, we found ourselves with limited resources. We had no access to funds, including the money from the Neerveli bank robbery, which Prabhakaran firmly believed belonged to TELO. Respecting his decision, we took only the weapons we had acquired prior to joining TELO. Around this time, some PLOTE members, including Umamaheswaran, fled to India after robbing the Kilinochchi bank in October 1981.

Following Sundaram's assassination, tensions between the LTTE and PLOTE escalated significantly, with reports suggesting that PLOTE was actively seeking revenge against us. Prabhakaran and I typically carried weapons, as I had been wanted by the Sri Lankan government since 1976. In India, however, where there was no immediate threat from Sri Lankan forces, carrying arms was generally uncommon. Nevertheless, due to the rivalry with PLOTE and the persistent danger it posed, we continued to carry weapons for our safety.

I wanted to avoid any confrontations and urged Prabhakaran not to engage in violent actions while in India, where civilians were unaccustomed to firearms and might react unpredictably or aggressively. However, he dismissed my caution, declaring his intent to kill Umamaheswaran if he encountered him anywhere. This defiance of restraint set the stage for the Pandya Bazaar shooting, an event that would further intensify the already volatile situation.

What exactly happened on the infamous Pandya Bazaar shooting day?

On the day of the incident, on May 19, 1982, I was with Prabhakaran, Nesan, and a friend of Prabhakaran's from Germany, whose name I can't recall. This friend had invited us to a movie and then took us to a popular restaurant in T. Nagar for a meal. We had string hoppers. As we were leaving the restaurant, we saw Uma Maheswaran and Kannan, PLOTE's military head, on a motorcycle. We thought they were following us to kill us. Prabhakaran and I instructed the other two to distance themselves and act as if they were not with us.

We believed they were following us with the intent to kill, while they likely thought the same. Gunfire erupted. Kannan was taking a position to defend, but Uma Maheswaran did not; he managed to escape. Uma was known for fleeing in such situations, while Kannan held his ground. Unfortunately, Kannan's gun malfunctioned, and he was ultimately wounded by, I believe, five bullets.

Do you think that they were indeed following you with the intent to kill in Pandya Bazaar?

It's quite possible. Their presence in a crowded area like T. Nagar without any apparent reason seemed suspicious. As we were leaving, they stood beside their motorcycle, raising concerns. While this might have been a coincidence, I can't say with complete certainty what their intentions were.

Some accounts suggest you and Prabhakaran reacted impulsively and immediately opened fire upon seeing them. Is that accurate?



No, it is not entirely correct. The situation at the time was already extremely tense, and when we encountered Uma and Kannan, we assumed that they were following us to kill us, and it was both impulse and fear.

What happened after that?

We were arrested and detained for three months in Chennai Central Jail. After that, we were granted conditional bail. As part of the bail conditions, I was placed in Pudukottai, Prabhakaran in Madurai, and Uma Maheswaran in Chennai. We were each guarded by two policemen and were strictly prohibited from traveling to another city.

While I was out on bail in Puthukoddai, I was somewhat mischievous with the police officers assigned to guard me. I would rent a bicycle and ride as fast as I could, forcing the

poor policemen to chase after me on their bikes. While in Puthukoddai, I met members and supporters of various political parties, including the DMK, the Communist Party, and the DK. I shared insights about the Tamil national struggle with them, and they often visited me for discussions. They treated me with great respect and took good care of me.

With their support, I would sometimes ask them to stay in my room while the police remained outside. Taking advantage of this, I would secretly slip out through the back door and travel to Madurai to meet Prabakaran. Similarly, I clandestinely met with Sivaneswaran, a PLOTE member who was later killed on Uma Maheswaran's orders. During our meeting, we spoke openly about the destructive nature of factional conflicts. Despite our ideological differences, we developed a mutual respect for one another. During our conversation, he revealed

something startling—he had once followed me to a garage where I used to receive letters.

This led me to realize that Uma Maheswaran and Kannan might have been following us with the intent to kill us. Given the circumstances and the escalating rivalries at the time, it was certainly a plausible possibility.

Was Sivaneswaran a high-ranking member of PLOTE at that time?

At that time, only a small number of individuals were involved in militant movements, so nearly everyone carried significant responsibilities. Sivaneswaran was a prominent member. It was only after the state-sponsored violence of 1983 that youth began joining the liberation movements in large numbers. If not for the orchestrated riots of July 1983 under the J.R. Jayewardene government, these militant organizations might never have grown to the extent that they eventually did.

What happened to Sivaneswaran?

As I mentioned earlier, following the 1983 riots, many young people joined various liberation movements. However, the internal killings and pervasive lawlessness within these groups led many to leave as well. Sivaneswaran was one such individual who chose to walk away from PLOTE in 1984, the same year I decided to leave the LTTE.

I met Sivaneswaran again after I left the LTTE in April 1984. During our conversation, I warned him to completely avoid any association with PLOTE, emphasizing that these were essentially murderous organizations.

This wasn't just my view of PLOTE but

also of TELO and the LTTE—when it came to senseless killings, there was little to differentiate them. Sivaneswaran assured me that he was planning to move to a safer place, specifically the MLA hostel in Chennai, where PLOTE members occasionally gathered.

Tragically, he was later abducted from there by PLOTE members, brutally tortured, and ultimately killed on Uma Maheswaran's orders. His brother Wigneswaran, who had traveled from Sri Lanka to India upon hearing of his abduction, was reportedly killed by PLOTE as well.

Wigneswaran's daughter, Kavitha Laxmi, a gifted dancer with a grace that captivates, now resides in Norway. When I had the opportunity to meet her, I could sense the weight of unanswered questions she carries. She is still searching for the truth—how, where, and why her father was taken from her.

During your time, which organization had the highest number of internal killings?

That would be PLOTE in the 80s. The most brutal internal killings took place within their ranks. PLOTE was initially founded on anti-LTTE rhetoric, branding the Tigers as a dictatorial movement led by Prabhakaran, whom they accused of authoritarianism. PLOTE promoted socialist ideals, attracting influential figures such as Santhathiyar, Govinthan, and Selvi, who saw it as a democratic alternative. However, as the movement expanded after the 1983 riots, PLOTE's leadership grew increasingly insecure. Although they projected a democratic image, they were anything but. Uma Maheswaran and his associates actively suppressed any democratic principles within the organization.

In contrast, anyone joining the LTTE understood that it was a strictly controlled, non-democratic organization. Dissent was rarely tolerated, and expressing opposing views often led to severe consequences. I shared my concerns about the LTTE only with a few close friends and with Anton Balasingham within the organization, as openly criticizing the movement was extremely dangerous—especially after 1983.

I estimate that PLOTE was responsible for at least a hundred internal killings. Some former members of PLOTE recently told me that the killing squad of PLOTE began to "enjoy" the act of killing, even asking, "Is there no one left to torture or kill today?" I was taken aback to hear this. Others didn't enjoy it but felt they had no choice, claiming they were simply following orders. Many believed that if their leader, Uma Maheswaran, commanded it, it must be for a justified reason.

When you are intensely loyal to an organization and its leadership, that loyalty can compel you to do almost anything. This issue is not unique to militant groups; it can also be observed within a sovereign state's military



and police establishments. Brutality can become normalized. Initially, killing may feel shocking, but with repetition, it becomes routine—an act embedded within the system.

Did some members of the LTTE seem to take pleasure in these killings?

Yes, certain members did seem to derive enjoyment from it. But, as with any organization, there were different types of individuals. From my observations, the most skilled fighters and genuine leaders were usually not involved in torture or needless killings. Those who were often responsible for internal killings tended to be individuals unfit for real combat and, quite frankly, cowards.

For example, there was an LTTE member ironically nicknamed Gandhi, despite being a notorious killer. Another was Kittu, who served as the LTTE's Jaffna commander. Kittu was known for his problematic behavior—he frequently abused and even physically assaulted others within the

organization. Despite these tendencies, he was promoted because of his loyalty to Prabhakaran, who granted him significant freedom to act as he pleased.

When did you reach the point of deciding you could no longer remain in the Tigers? What factors contributed to that decision?

My departure from the LTTE wasn't a single event but rather a gradual process influenced by various incidents over time. In 1980, following the internal killings of Michael and Paragunam, the LTTE split. At that time, I strongly supported Prabhakaran, believing that everyone in the organization—especially the central committee (not an elected body but one appointed primarily by Prabhakaran)—should share collective responsibility for these killings. Holding Prabhakaran solely accountable seemed unfair to me. I argued that if necessary, Prabhakaran could step down or the organization could adopt collective leadership, but singling him out as the sole cause felt unjust.

While a few of us remained loyal to Prabhakaran, most senior members, including figures like Iyer and Nagarajan Master, sided against him. The group supporting Prabhakaran comprised around eighteen individuals, including Ponnammam, Anton Master, and Mathaya, while about twenty-five others joined the opposing faction. Some, like Kumarappa, left the organization. He went to London for his studies but returned to the Tigers after the 1983 riots.

Shortly after the split, I went to India, where Prabhakaran began collaborating with Kuttimani and Thangathurai's TELO organization. As I mentioned earlier,

Prabhakaran approached me personally, explaining the alliance with TELO and urging me to return. Although I wasn't fully convinced, I trusted Prabhakaran's dedication, so I agreed and resumed my role training new recruits in Madurai around 1981.

In this role, I took full responsibility for the training process—structuring schedules, designing routines, and managing daily activities. I even created a comprehensive regimen covering everything: wake-up times, training sessions, discussions, meals, and rest periods. In a way, I became a mini-dictator in the training camp (he laughs). Inspired by Che Guevara's writings, I also taught guerrilla tactics to the recruits.

However, tensions between TELO and Prabhakaran began to surface, especially after the arrests of Kuttimani and Thangathurai. I stood firmly with Prabhakaran at that time, believing the Tigers should operate independently.

After the 1981 gunfight at Pondy Bazaar, I made it clear that if internal conflicts like this persisted, I would eventually have to leave the organization. Shortly after the Pondy Bazaar incident, I stepped away and stayed in Jayanagar, Bangalore.

Later, following the 1983 riots, Anton Balasingham reached out to me and urged me to rejoin the Tigers. I did return, but I became increasingly disillusioned with the growing intolerance within the organization and its shift toward authoritarian centralization around Prabhakaran. The LTTE was losing all semblance of democratic principles. By April 1984, I made the decision to leave for good—and I've never looked back.

To be continued

“Nathaswara Osaiyile” (நாதஸ்வர ஓசையிலே): An ancient art form that defines a people Part-1



BY:

Mahesan Nirmalan
MBBS, MD, FRCA, PhD, FFICM
Manchester, United Kingdom

*“What are we when
stripped away from our
cultural roots?...that is
the question?”*

Background: The eminent scholar late Professor Karthikesu Sivathambi in 2003 gave an account of the prevailing mood amongst academics with an interest in traditional art forms of South Asia. “A researcher from an American university who was working on Sri Lankan music said there was nothing worth knowing about carnatic music in this country. After all, much of it was a copy of what is found in Madras” (One Hundred Tamils of the 20th Century. Tamil Nation.org). In response to this prevailing attitude, Professor Sivathamby posed the following question “have we done justice by musicologists such as Veeramani Iyer, Nadaraja Iyer;.....and Nathaswaram players like N. K. Pathmanathan, Balakrishnan, Panchapakesan, and the all-time great Thavil player Thedchanamoorthy?” (One Hundred Tamils of the 20th Century. Tamil Nation.org). The answer to this challenge, posed almost 2 decades ago, still remains a firm NO. Despite all the wealth, pomp and pageantry clearly on display at functions involving the Sri Lankan Tamil community in many Western capitals and Sri Lanka, the contributions made by members of this community to the world of art or music - which surely lie at the very heart of any civilised community, still remain opaque



to the wider world. Any information publicly available is largely in the Tamil language and hence inaccessible to those not conversant in written Tamil. This article is a modest attempt by an amateur historian to address this important gap by recording the contributions made by the Sri Lankan Tamil community to Nathaswaram/Thavil music - an art form that continues to define the cultural identity of Sri Lankan Tamils to this day. Despite the impressive achievements by some of its proponents, their identities and achievements remain largely unknown beyond a small group of enthusiasts. The revival of post-war Sri Lanka will be incomplete if limited to restoring roads, schools, temples and playgrounds alone, for it surely must also include inculcating a sense of cultural pride amongst the next generation. The recognition and archiving the contributions by some of the frontline Nathaswaram and Thavil Vidwans (a term used to describe an accomplished musician) is an integral part of this project.

Introductory notes on the history of Nathaswaram in Sri Lanka: Nathaswaram

is a double reed wind instrument, which has been considered to be an auspicious musical instrument in South India and Sri Lanka. Usually performed in temples, weddings and other auspicious events in the community, it has grown to be an integral part of South Indian and Sri Lankan Tamil cultures. Accompanied by Thavil, a traditional percussion instrument, Nathaswaram renders itself as a suitable vehicle to produce a wide range of melodies based on classical Carnatic or Hindustani traditions and cinema songs rooted in classical ragas. Considered to be the loudest non-brass musical instrument it is referred to in a variety of names such as natacuvaram, nadaswaram, nagaswaram or nayanam. Nāgasura or nāgasara (than Nathaswaram) are the commoner terms used to describe this instrument in early literature (*Yoshitaka Terada; Temple Music Traditions in Hindu South India: Periya Mēlam and Its Performance Practice*). On the basis of the auspiciousness attributed to this instrument and its frequent association with Hindu temples it is commonly referred to as the 'Mangala' (auspicious) 'vadyam' (musical

instrument). The loud, majestic, commanding but yet versatile nature of the music which is highly suited for out-door royal processions and/or ceremonies has also led to the name 'Raja' (or royal) 'Vadyam'. As the Raja Vadyam, tradition dictates that when performed it should always be treated as the lead instrument in any ensemble and should not be delegated to a secondary or supporting roles.

The origins of Nadaswaram – a historical perspective: Wind instruments have been an integral part of South Indian culture from time immemorial. The ancient Tamil classic Cilappathikaram by Prince Ilanko Adikal (commonly believed to be composed in the 5-6th Century AD) frequently refers to Yarl (or யாழ்) and Kulal (or குழல்) as instruments performed in dance recitals at royal palaces. In the 'Puhar Kandan' (or the Puhar Chapter), Ilango Adikal refers to:

“யாழும் குழலும் சீரும் மிதறும்
தாழ்குரல் தண்ணுமை ஆடலோடு இவற்றின்
இசைந்த பாடல் இசையுடன் படுத்து
வறிக்கும் ஆடற்கும் உரிப்பொருள் இயக்கித்
தேசிக்கத் திருவின் ஓசை கடைப்பிடித்து”

There can be no doubt from this verse that Ilango Adikal is clearly referring to an elaborate orchestral performance including wind and string instruments embellishing Madavi's dance recital. However it is impossible to establish the exact nature of these instruments or their modern derivatives. As Ilango Adikal has not provided a description of the instruments or how they were handled by their performers, the exact nature of 'குழல்' alluded to in Cilappathikaram (and other Sangam literature) will remain speculative. It may be the bamboo flute (commonly used in dance recitals even in modern times) or some other instrument which may have been a precursor of the modern 'Nathaswaram'. Temple carvings dated back to the 13th century at Amrutapura in the

Chikkamagalur district in Hoysala, Karnataka show instruments similar to the Nathaswaram being used in royal palaces. Similarly temple carvings in Cithambaram in South India also show the use of a shorter version of the Nathaswaram in temple processions. Even though the exact dating of these carvings are difficult to establish, post 10th century seems to be a fair guess.

It is however possible that the wind instrument referred to as the 'Vangiyam' (or வங்கியம்) alluded to in the Thirumurai - a twelve-volume collection of holy songs or hymns in praise of god in Tamil from the 6th to the 11th century CE by various poets, makes a clear reference to one of the precursors of the modern Nathaswaram. The following verse is an example:

“ஏழு விரல் இடை இட்ட இன்னிசை வங்கியம்
எடுத்துத்
தாழுமலர் வரிவண்டு தாது பிடிப்பன போலச்
சூழுமுரன்று எழ நின்று தூய பெரும் தனித்
துளையில்
வாழிய நந்தோன்றலார் மணி அதரம் வைத்தா
த” (Thirumurai 12.0948)

The description of the instrument Vangiyam in the above verse is that of an instrument played standing with seven fingers, while blowing through a single hole. Furthermore, the description of the nature of the sound produced by the Vangiyam in Thirumurai 12.3097, as being loud and rousing towards the culmination of the ceremony can be compared with the contemporary practice of sounding the 'Ketti Melam' (கெட்டி மேளம்) which is used to highlight the culmination of a wedding (the tying of the Thali on the bride's neck by the groom) or the offering of the special 'Deepa Arathi' (or special ornate lamps during the Poojas) to the deity adds credence to the claim that the instrument Vangiyam referred to in Thirumurai may indeed be a precursor of the modern day Nathaswaram

“சங்கொடு தாரை சின்னம் தனிப் பெரும்
காளம் தாளம்
வங்கியம் ஏனை மற்று மலர் துளைக் கருவி
எல்லாம்
பொங்கிய ஒலியின் ஒங்கிப் பூசுரர் வேத கீதம்
எங்கணும் எழுந்து மல்கத் திருமணம்
எழுந்தது அன்றே ” (Thirumurai 12.3097)

The existence of wondering musicians in South India has been recognised during the Pallava and Pandiya periods extending between the 5-9th centuries and their musical traditions may have strengthened further with royal patronage during the Chola and Vijayanagara periods between the 9th-17th centuries. Though the exact chronology of events remain vague it is probably around this time period, with the rise of ‘Saivism’ and ‘Vaishnavism’- with devotion as a key driver of social change, these groups of nomadic musicians referred to as the ‘Melakarars’ (drummers) or ‘Nayanakaras’ (Nathaswaram players), became established within the temple cultures of South India. Some of these groups were native to Tanjavur district in Tamil Nadu whereas others migrated from Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. The 11th-century inscription of Raja Rajah I states that the Tevaratiyar (தேவரடியார்- female artisans who served gods in temples), were invited to serve at the Brihadisvara Temple and were given land near the temple. In Tamil Nadu, the Tevaratiyar and their accompanying troops of musicians were often referred to as ‘Chinna Melakarar’ (சின்ன மேளக்காரர்). The term ‘Chinna Melakarar’ refers to people who play the small drums-like Miruthangam, wind instruments (harmonium, flute) and cymbals. The male members of the same community were known as ‘Periya Melakarar’ (பெரிய மேளக்காரர்). The ‘Periya Melakarar’ means those who play big instruments such as the Nathaswaram and large drums named Thavil (From: T. M Krishna. A Southern Music).

Yoshitaka Terada makes the following observations on the history of Nathaswaram and Thavil: “the earliest inscription referring to these instruments is dated in 1496 and is found in Tirumala (Chittoor district, Andhra Pradesh). This inscription in Tamil records that an equal amount of money (2 paṇam) was to be paid to the naṭṭuvar (dance master) and muttukkārār (timekeeper), emperumāṇaḍiyār (temple dancers), and the players of dola and nāgasara (Vijayaraghavacharya 1933, 318–24). Another Tamil inscription found inside the Govindarajasvami Temple in Tirupati records the employment of two nāgasvaram (nāgasuram) musicians with the contractual terms of remuneration (36 rekhai-pon per year) (Vijayaraghavacharya 1937, 396–406). An inscription, dated 1549 and found at the Nilakantha Temple in the village of Nitturu (Anantapur district, Andhra Pradesh), reports a gift of lands donated to the temple for the maintenance of service by six dancing girls, Bhavagata chanters and nāgasara musicians” (Yoshitaka Terada; Temple Music Traditions in Hindu South India: Periya Mēlam and Its Performance Practice.)

From these records it is clear that these groups of musicians formed a very distinct social group (or social class/caste) in Tamil Nadu by the 15th century – the very latest. The ‘Peri Melakarars’, ‘Chinna Melakarars’ ‘Nattuvanars’ and ‘Tevaratiyar’ who formed part of these wondering groups were dedicated to music, particularly the creation, growth and practice of various forms of music and dance. Even though the ‘Melakarars’, ‘Nayanakaras’ and ‘Tevaratiyar’ were intimately involved in the affairs of the temple and the growth of traditional Tamil/classical music, they were – contrary to expectations, subject to social discrimination (perhaps due to their wandering/nomadic life styles) and classified as ‘other backward classes’ in official records (Kalelkar commission 1953). Recognising the

vital role played by these groups to the Tamil culture, they were renamed as 'Isai Vellalars' (or cultivators of music) in 1947 by the then government of Tamil Nadu.

Arrival of Nadaswaram and Thavil in Sri

Lanka: A brief and critical appraisal of ancient Sri Lanka's history shows that there were free interactions between the royal houses of South India and Sri Lanka. These interactions encompassed all aspects of life including marriage, governance, military assistance, inheritance, economy, and of course culture. In such an interconnected system that facilitated and encouraged cultural exchanges, musical traditions too must have been freely exchanged between these kingdoms. There are however no historical records that can clearly confirm as to when Nathaswaram and Thavil may have been adopted by people living in Sri Lanka. Ariyapala, notes the use of 'Naka-curam' in the royal courts of mediaeval Ceylon in 13th Century CE (*Ariyapala. Society in mediaeval Ceylon. PhD Thesis, University of London 1956*). Unfortunately Ariyapala does not provide a reference to support this claim and hence the reference to 13th century may be speculative rather than factual. 'Yarlpana Vaipava Malai'- a brief record of the history and life within the Jaffna kingdom from mythological times to the takeover by the Dutch in 1640 AD, lists all social groups (or castes) who were part of society at the time, but does not mention the groups – 'Melakarars', 'Nattuvanars', and 'Tevaratiyar' as a distinct group living in the kingdom. Given the prominent role played by these groups in the activities of the temples – the centre stage of social life at the time, the omission of these groups in the *Vaipava Malai*, cannot be accidental. This omission therefore implies that the movement of these artisans from South India to Sri Lanka was an event that followed the period covered in the 'Vaipava Malai'.

There is however no doubt that Nathaswaram and Thavil formed an important part of cultural life in Sri Lanka from about the late 18th century. Based on verbal history obtained from members of the community, the first Nathaswaram Vidwan who arrived in Sri Lanka was 'Sivapunniyam' (சிவபுண்ணியம்) from the village of Thirupuhloor (திருப்புகலூர்) in Tanjavur district (*Source: Mr T Ketheeswaran, Nadaswaram Vidwan and Mr Balakrishnan, Son in law of Nadaswaram Vidwan Mr Panchabikesan*). He - along with his Thavil partner Sinnaswamy Nattuvanar (சின்னசாமி நட்டுவனார்), moved to Jaffna in 1782 at the invitation of the trustees of the Mavittapuram Kandaswamy temple to become the resident artists at this temple. Apart from this duo who decided to settle long-term in the island several other Nathaswaram/Thavil artists moved freely to Sri Lanka to perform at the annual temple festivals across the entire country. Even though most of the temples where these performances took place were in the Jaffna district, it is noteworthy that temples outside Jaffna – Koneswaram temple in Trincomalee, Muneswaram temple in Chilaw and Ponnampalawaneshwarar temple in Colombo, were also attracting many of these artists to their annual festivals. Most of this migration took place during the Hindu revival movement that occurred in the 19th century under the leadership of Sri Arumuganavalar. In order to seek support for his attempts at regularising temple worship and align the rituals to the 'Agamic' principles, Navalur visited the Thiruvavaduthurai Saiva Monastery (திருவாவடுதுறை ஆதீனம்) in 1849 and the interest generated by this visit led to a large number of South Indian priests and temple artists developing an interest in performing at different temples across the island. Below is a summary of the names of some of the artists who moved to Sri Lanka in this first wave and the temples where they served. (*Source: a monograph written by Mr T Ketheeswaran, a leading contemporary Nathaswaram Vidwan*)

Name of artist	Temple where they served
Suppaiah (Nathaswaram)	Nallur Kandaswamy Temple
Vaithilingam (Nathaswaram)	Valvattithurai sivan temple
Suppaiah (Nathaswaram)	Point Pedro Sivan Temple
Subramaniam (Nathaswaram)	Kytes, Karamban sivan temple
Thirupuhaloar Somaskantha (Nathaswaram)	Ponnamkala waneshwar Temple, Colombo
Palanivel (Nathaswaram)	Muneswaram Sivan Temple, Chilaw

The majority of the above mentioned originated from the districts of Tanjavur and Tirunelveli in Tamil Nadu. They married into families in Pungudu Tivu and Chavakacheri areas and made Sri Lanka their homes. The descendants of these families continue to nurture this art form and, to date, and function as its guardians. In more recent years, coinciding with the establishment of a financially strong Tamil diaspora in many western countries, the descendants of these early pioneers have taken this art form to many countries in Europe, North America, Australia and the Far East (Malaysia and Singapore in particular). This historical record is only a brief snap shot of the history of Nadaswaram and Thavil in Sri Lanka and must not be taken as a comprehensive or systematic analysis of history. However, by all accounts it seems most likely that this art form has been an integral part of the South Indian culture for over 500 years and may have reached the shores of Sri Lanka approximately 250 years ago.

Since these early, albeit somewhat vague, history regarding its origins and roots, there is no doubt that during the past 250 years or so Carnatic music in general and Nathaswaram

& Thavil in particular have occupied a central stage in the cultural life of the Tamil community in Sri Lanka and has been a key component of the community's identity. When we analyse the more recent migratory history of the community, it is evident that Nadaswaram and Thavil music has followed the community wherever they went and has been adapted to suit the changing needs in asserting their cultural heritage in their adopted homes. Many performers who migrated to these countries have resurrected the musical traditions of their fore fathers and have achieved a prominent place within these new societies.

The basic structure and evolution of the Nadaswaram: The Nadaswaram is a double reed wind instrument. It has a long body (Kuzal or குழல்) with seven fingering holes made of aged wood. Attached to the top portion of the tube is a metal staple and a small metallic cylinder (kendai) is inserted into it. The mouth piece made of the double reed (Seevali) is attached to the *kendai*. The lower end of the body is an expanding bell-shaped base called Anasu. The nadaswaram has seven fingering holes placed at equal distances along the body of the instrument and a further five holes drilled at the bottom which act as controllers. Of these five supplementary (or control) holes two pairs are placed opposite each other called the Brahma swarams and the fifth hole is lower down called the Adhara Swaram. In appearance and quality the Nadaswaram closely resembles the 'Shehnai', a wind instrument which was popular amongst the nomadic musicians from North India. The Shehnai is also made out of wood, with a double reed at one end and a metal or wooden flared bell at the other end. The sound created by the Shehnai is also considered to be auspicious and hence was quickly adopted into the temple cultures and out-door royal processions, just as was the case with the Nadaswaram.

Very broadly, there are two types of Nathaswarams called the Thimiri Nathaswaram or the Bari Nathaswaram. The Thimiri Nathaswarams are shorter with the length of the Kulal measuring approximately 18-20 inches. It has a higher pitch (4.5-5 Kattai or G). The Bari Nathaswaram on the other hand is longer with the Kulal measuring almost 30 inches with a pitch varying between 2.5 or 3 'Kattai' (D, D Sharp or E). From an evolutionary point of view, it appears that the Thimiri Nathaswaram predates the Bari, and may be a more direct derivative from the Shehnai of North India. It also appears that the transition from the former to the latter occurred during the time of the most legendary Nathaswaram Vidwan - T N Rajarthnam Pillai (or TNR; 1898-1956), from Thiruvavaduthurai in Tamil Nadu. The musical collaboration between TNR and a traditional Nathaswaram maker - Ranganathan Achari, from Narasingapettai (a village near Kumbakonam, Tamil Nadu) around 1955 resulted in the Bari Nathaswaram where 'all the seven swaras spoke' and the lower pitch emanating from a more majestic looking longer instrument appealed to the outdoor temple environment in which the instrument was used most frequently and the tastes of the listening public who were mostly temple devotees (*T. M Krishna, The Southern Music*). The Thimiri Nathaswaram however is still in use by some of the Nathaswaram Vidwans. For example, in the mid 1970s a group of Nathaswaram players from Sri Lanka – such as the legendary N K Pathmanathan from Alavetti and Mr Panchamoorthy from Kondavil, experimented with the Thimiri Nathaswaram for a brief period leading to a great break from tradition. It must be noted that some musicians such as Vidwan M Panchapikesan refused to change their practice and remained loyal to the low-pitched Bari Nathaswaram. The resultant controversy lasted for a short period with the entire community

subsequently deciding to settle for the use of the Bari, mostly due to pressure from the listening public, temple authorities and concert organisers. The relative difficulty and the greater (physical) effort required in handling the Thimiri Nathaswaram meant that the older (and perhaps physically weaker) Vidwans were not able to perform with the Thimiri for long periods and hence the community may have decided to settle for the Bari as most concerts – especially temple based performances, necessitated people from different generations having to perform together. There is also no doubt that the Bari Nathaswaram was a more elegant instrument and the extra length added to a sense of majesty which enhanced the visual appeal of the performers at out-door processions/concerts

Notable Vidwans of recent times: With the information currently available to us, it is not possible to come up with a complete record of artists who have helped shape the Nathaswaram/Thavil landscape in Sri Lanka. The following list is compiled from a monograph written in Tamil by Mr T Ketheeswaran, who was one of the accompanying artists of Alavetti N K Pathmanathan. Ketheeswaran currently lives in Sri Lanka and is an accomplished artist in his own right. The information provided by Ketheeswaran was cross referenced against information provided to the author by late Mr Balakrishnan (Son in Law of late Mr M Panchabikesan), Vidwan M K Nagenthiran (Son of late Mr M Panchapikesan) and Mr Panchamoorthy – one of the few remaining Vidwans from the older generation. For ease of classification the list of Vidwans is classified as early (1900-1970), intermediate (1970 – 2009) and contemporary (2009- present). This classification is entirely arbitrary and is based on the subjective impressions of the author (and his team) and the lack of completeness is acknowledged.

Nadaswaram	Thavil
Early Vidwans	
Nallur Murugaiah Pillai	Jaffna Kamachisundaram Sinnathurai
Chavakacheri Shanmugam Pillai	Inuvil Sinnathambi Kanagasabapathy
Jaffna Appulingam Pillai	Periya Palani (பெரிய பழனி)
Mavittapuram Rajah	Chavakacheri Murugappa Pillai
Kondavil Gothandapani	Jaffna Rajagopal
Navali Govindaswamy	Periya Ganesu (பெரிய கணேசு)
Seerkali Thirunavukarasu	Inuvil Viswalingam
Inuvil Uruthiraapathi	Jaffna Palanivel (Sinna Palani)
Mavittapuram Uruthirapathi	
Jaffna Kandaswamy Pillai	
Jaffna Ramaiya Pillai	
Intermediate Vidwans	
Alavetti N K Pathmanathan	V Thakshinamurthi
Kondavil Balakrishnan	N R Sinnaraja (Inuvil)
Chavakacheri Panchabikesan	K Kanesapillai (Nachimarkoviladi)
Vadiri Thurairajah	R Puniyamurthy (Inuvil)
Kondavil Ganamurthy/ Panchamurthy Brothers	N Kumaraguru (Alavetti)
Sithambaranathan	M Nadarajasundaram Pillai (Chavakacheri)
Contemporary Vidwans	
T Ketheeswaran (Alavetti)	Allavetti Udaya Shanker

M P Nagenthiram (Chavakacheri/ Canada)	Inuvil Suthakaran
P Kumaran (Kondavil)	Inuvil P S Senthil Nathan
P S Balamurugan (Nallur)	Inuvil P Vipoornan
	Manipay N Prasanna

The above list, as mentioned before, is not comprehensive, and it is certain that some key artists – possibly giants at their times, have been missed out. In a society, which has been notably poor in recording, archiving and preserving activities that define their history, we have to depend on oral history to place on record the key milestones. Despite the incompleteness, it is essential to record the lives and achievements of six major personalities in this space for posterity.

1. Kalasuri Alavetti Dr N K Pathmanathan:

Kalasuri N K Pathmanathan or Alavetti N K Pathmanathan (NKP) as he was popularly known within the music circles, was simply the most brightly shining star amongst the galaxy of Nathaswaram Vidwans from Sri Lanka. NKP was born in the village of Alavetti in the Jaffna district in 1931 (19/09/1931). His father's name was Nagalingam Kandaswamy and his mother's name was Parimalam Kandaswamy. His father was also an accomplished Nathaswaram Vidwan, and as such, NKP had his early training from his father at home. He went on to receive further apprenticeship with Jaffna P S Kandaswamy Pillai (கந்தசாமிபிள்ளை) and further lessons during the period 1945-1955 from the visiting Vidwan, Seerkali Thirunavukarasu (சீர்காழி திருநாவுக்கரசு). This period is considered to be crucial in NKP's subsequent development as an

outstanding Nathaswaram Vidwan who was respected all over the Tamil-speaking world. The joint performances with his Guru Thirunavukarasu for approximately two years drew the attention of many critiques and fans. NKP is reported to have stated that the opportunity he had in working in the troupes of maestros such as SS Appulingam Pillai (அப்புலிங்கம் பிள்ளை), S Murugaiah Pillai (முருகையா பிள்ளை) and P A Arumugam Pillai (ஆறுமுகம் பிள்ளை) as the time keeper (or cymbal player - சல்லடி) helped him to acquire a very fine understanding of timing and its variations during the course of a performance. Throughout his subsequent career he was highly acclaimed for his control of the rhythm and timing while performing even the most complex 'keerthanas' (கீர்த்தனை), pallavi (பல்லவி), Kalpanaswarms (கல்பனா ஸ்வரம்) and Thillanas (தில்லானா). He kept the listeners spell bound with his 'Mallari' (மல்லாரி) performances at the annual Nallur Temple festivals where he served as the Asthana Vidwan (ஆஸ்தான வித்துவான்) for almost 40 years. The Thavil maestro Yalpanam Thakshinamurthi (யாழ்ப்பாணம் தக்ஷணாமுர்த்தி) and Thavil Vidwan P S Sarangapani (சாரங்கபாணி) are two of the notable Thavil Vidwans who were members of his troupe. The Nathaswaram Vidwans who performed along with NKP include Mr Balakrishnan and Mr R Ketheeswaran – with the latter being his longstanding partner. However, it is fair to say that NKP has performed jointly with almost all frontline Vidwans of his time – both in Sri Lanka as well as in South India. In recognition of his contributions, he was honoured at the 1963 'Kumbabishekam' (கும்பாபிஷேகம்) of the Muneswaram Temple in Chilaw by the legendary musician Maharajapuram Santhanam (மகாராஜபுரம் சந்தானம்). In 1964 at the Sekilar Festival (சேக்கிழார் மகாநாடு) the

title 'Nathaswara Kalanithi' (நாதஸ்வர கலாநிதி) was conferred on him by Sir Kandaiah Vaithiyanathan. NKP has the unique honour of having performed at the West Minister Abbey in 1978. In 1982, the government of J R Jayawardena conferred the 'Kalasuri' award – the highest national award for an artist conferred by the state. In 2004, the University of Jaffna conferred a Hon Doctorate on NKP for the services rendered.

NKP was the father of 4 boys and three girls. The last stages of NKP was marred by the untimely death of one of his sons (the sole heir to his divine music) at the hands of the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF). Mass displacement and the tragic loss of his son compelled a dejected NKP to move to Colombo where he continued to perform at the Colombo Captain Gardens Temple



Kalasuri Alavetti DR N K Pathmanathan- the legendary Nadaswaram player of all time



NKP performing with Alavetti Mr T Ketheeswaran (Left) – a long term accomplice and disciple and Point Pedro S N Rajathurai (Right)- also referred to as Pallavi Mannan (The king of Pallavies- a form of carnatic musical composition popular at Nadaswaram concerts).

– largely to an audience who were unaware of the grandeur and fame of NKP in his prime. The sight of a diminished NKP performing at the Captain Garden Temple will no doubt haunt all of us who knew him as the ‘Nathaswara Chakarawarthi’ (நாதஸ்வர சக்கரவர்த்தி – or the emperor of Nathaswaram) who reigned over the world of Carnatic music for over 3 decades from his humble home in Alavetti. NKP passed away at the age of 72 and his daughters currently live in Sri Lanka and Germany.

2. Dr M Panchapikesan:

Whilst NKP was the ‘Northern Star’ in the world of Nathaswaram, there can be no doubt who the ‘Alpha Curcis’ was. Born in 1924 as the eldest son of the highly acclaimed Thavil Vidwan – Chavakacheri Murugappa Pillai (முருகப்பாபிள்ளை), Dr M Panchapikesan reined over the world

of Nathaswaram music in Thenmaratchi (தென்மராட்சி- the Southern part of Jaffna district) until his death in 2015. His father, Murugappa Pillai was one the leading Thavil artists of his time. Accompanying Nadaswaram Vidwans Appulingam Pillai and Shanmugam Pillai, the group pioneered the concept of two Nathaswaram/Thavil Vidwans playing in tandem at concerts. This innovation was considered a major mile stone in the evolution of Nathaswaram music drawing attention of musicologists and enthusiasts from across the world. The privilege of having born as the son of this percussion maestro, introduced young Panchapikesan to the world of Nathaswaram music at a very young age. Through the efforts of his father, he had his early training from the prodigies of the time – Appulingam Pillai and Shanmugam Pillai. Having demonstrated his skills to the wider world at the tender age of 14 – at

the Sitti Vinayagar Temple concert in Point Pedro, he proceeded to India for further training. He had the privilege of living in the house of the all-time legendary T N Rajaratnam Pillai for almost one year and this period no doubt accounts for the dizzy heights Panchabikesan was to ascend subsequently in his musical career. The Thavil artist who accompanied him for over 40 years was his own brother Chavakacheri Nadarajasundaram Pillai. Panchapikesan performed many concerts where he was accompanied by Allavetti Thakshinamurthi, the all-time great Thavil player. It is reported that it was the desire to accompany Panchapikesan that brought Thakshinamurthi back to public performances after a brief break in his career due to ill health. The blend of traditional Carnatic compositions, selected versions of cinema songs and the songs of Subramaniya Bharathi made his concerts highly sought after by people of all age groups. The tall traditional appearance – adorned with holy ash and ‘pottu’ on his forehead and his long and flowing hair tied behind in a ‘Kondai’ (கொண்டை), added a sense of intrigue to his concerts. As the resident artist of the sacred Thiruketheeswaarm (திருகேதீஸ்வரம்) temple in Mannar – one of the Pancha Eswarams of ancient Sri Lanka, he was highly sought after from around the country and the entire Tamil speaking world. Together with NKP and other frontline Nathaswaram players of his time, there is no doubt that Panchapikesan played a major role in developing this divine art form arguably several notches higher than what their counterparts in South India were able to achieve. Highly prestigious awards and titles followed. It is noteworthy that one of the first gold medals that was awarded to him was from a group of Islamic scholars at an Islamic religious festival held in Jaffna. The secular nature of the music that flowed

from his Nathaswaram, clearly appealed to all segments of the society.

The Jaffna University conferred the Hon Doctorate on Panchapikesan in 2010. The genre of Panchapikesan’s music thrives and continues to grow to this day through his two



Dr Panchapikesan in later Years.



Left to right: Kondavil Ganamurthy, Kondavil Panchamurthy (Ganamurthy/Panchamurthy brothers), Chavakacheri Dr M Panchapikesan, Alavetti Dr NKP, Alavetti R Ketheeswaran and Inuvil N R Sundaramurthy. The legendary Nadaswaram Vidwans performing together at a Thiyagaraja Festival. Year is unknown, but probably in the mid 70s

illustrious sons – M P Nagenthiran and M P Vigneswaran who are both highly acclaimed Nathaswaram Vidwans in Canada and Sri Lanka respectively. His grandsons continue the family tradition to this day in Sri Lanka and across the world

3. Vidwan Vathiri K Thuraiarah (KT):

Vidwan Thuraiarah's story is a key landmark in the history of Nadaswaram in Sri Lanka for a wide variety of reasons that go well beyond music. Vadiri is a small village close to Nelliady in the Vadamarachi region close to Point Pedro. The social and caste based discriminations widely prevalent in the Jaffna peninsula at the time prevented the incorporation of Nathaswaram and Thavil music at the temples festivals in this village. In response to this injustice, members of this community jointly identified youth amongst them who were gifted musicians and sponsored them to develop their skills in South India. One of the prodigies who came through such a challenging and discriminatory system was K Thuraiarah (KT). KT was born in 1922 (18/7/1922) to 'Kattaiyar' (Presumably meaning short man) and Letchumi. The family lived in Karavetti west, in the lands commonly referred to as 'Appa Valavu' (அப்பா வளவு). KT had his early education at the Vathiri North Methodist Mission school and started his musical career, through his own efforts accompanying his brother Thavil Vidwan K Kundumani. The discriminatory practices meant that KT was unable to find a suitable mentor/teacher within Jaffna, where the art form was propagated almost entirely within the Isai Vellalar families based on the Guru-Kulam traditions. He therefore travelled to Thirunelveli in Tamil Nadu where he trained under Vidwan M R Guruswamy. On his return KT and his brother K Kundumani joined hands in performing

concerts at temples and social functions – predominantly within their own communities, across the peninsula. The duo was popularly known as Kundumani-Thuraiarah Brothers. His first public performance was at the Achuveli Navakadu (அச்சுவேலி நாவக்காடு) murugan temple where he mesmerised a stunned audience and created a fan club for himself. Despite severe hardships and limited opportunities available to him - as a result of caste based discriminations, KT continued to out-perform many of his contemporaries who came from more established backgrounds. For more than 25 years he was listed amongst Grade A list of artists by radio Ceylon and the resultant opportunities brought fame to the Kundumani-Thuraiarah brothers nationally.

The fame brought disciples from across the peninsula, with many of his students overcoming very stiff social barriers in associating and learning from KT. One of the very notable disciples of KT is P S Balamurugan, who arguably is one of the most popular and accomplished current Nadaswaram artist. When interviewed by the writer, Balamurugan was reduced to tears at the scale of injustice KT had to endure in his musical career. In one occasion, when young Balamurugan was invited to play at one of the illustrious and historic Murugan temples in the Jaffna district (Not Nallur Kandaswamy Temple), KT was unable to attend and had to remain in a car, parked far away listening to the mesmerising performance of his disciple. On the return journey he is reported to have stated with tears in his eyes "I am glad you have been given opportunities that were not available to me". Such was the scale of caste based injustice in the peninsula. KT clearly was a man of great fortitude, character and charisma that he was able to withstand such blatant injustices and remain loyal to his music to his last days. Eventually, through his sheer skills and

mastery he did overcome many of these discriminatory practices with honours being bestowed upon him at many temples including the Karainagar Sivan Temple. Having listened to his performance at Mattuvil 'Panri Thalaichi' Amman temple Ganamurthy/Panchamurthy brothers are believed to have concurred that, had KT been born in a more traditional musical family the two of them would have been completely overshadowed to a point of oblivion. Veteran Maestro Appulingam Pillai in 1960 bestowed the title 'Gana Kaladaran' (கான கலாதரன்) and honoured him by wrapping him in the traditional 'Golden shawl'. Alavetti N K Pathmanathan too has joined the list of artists who have celebrated the achievements of KT



Illustrious Nadaswaram Vidwan Vadiri K Thurai Rajah. A musician par-excellence who rose to fame despite the wider community that tried to suppress his talents and personality.

in the world of Music. Having delighted his fans over 7 decades KT passed away in dignity on the 11th October 2009.



A youthful P S Balamurugan, greeting his Guru Vidwan 'Gana Kaladaran' K Thurai Rajah. This represents the wider community's acceptance of KT and his sheer musical excellence

4. Thavil Chakarawarthi (Emperor of Thavil) , Karavege Kesari (The king of finger speed), Karpanai Surangam (the mine of creativity) Thavil Vidwan Inuvil V Thakshinamurthi

Thavil artist Inuvil V Thakshinamurthi, epitomises the very essence of this short review, that the proponents of this art-form from Sri Lanka, in many respects out performed their counterparts in South India. In terms of finger speed, variety and clarity of notes even at very high finger speeds, it is fair to say there has been no other percussion artist who could match Thakshinamurthi to this day. The contrast with other Thavil/percussion artists of his time was so stark that the renowned

Miruthangam Vidwan Palakkad Mani Ayer (பாலக்காடு மணி ஜயர்) referred to Thakshinamurthi's Thavil talents as the 8th wonder of the world.

Thakshinamurthi was born in the village Inuvil, in the Jaffna district in 1933 to Thavil Vidwan Viswalingam and his wife Rathinam. As per the traditions of the Guru Kulam, he had his early training at home followed by formal lessons with Nachiyar Kovil Raghava Pillai (நாச்சியார் கோவில் ராகவ பிள்ளை). It is claimed that after training him for one year Raghava Pillai stated that there was nothing further he could teach his highly motivated young disciple. His passion was such that he would constantly train for over 12 hours at a stretch reaching new heights – both in finger speed and in rhythmic clarity and creativity. Commenting on his training the prestigious news daily Hindu commented that he was “a largely self-taught genius”. (The

Hindu 13th June 2016) His contemporaries include Yalpanam Kamachisundaram Pillai (யாழ்ப்பாணம் காமாட்சிகந்தரம் பிள்ளை), Inuvil Sinnathamby (இணுவில் சின்னத்தம்பி) and P S Rajagopal – all highly accomplished Thavil Vidwans. He also played Thavil with some legendary Thavil players from Tamil Nadu including Thiruvizhanthur Ramadasa Pillai (திருவிழந்தூர் ராமதாச பிள்ளை), Valangaiman Shanmugasundaram Pillai (வலங்கைமான் சண்முகசுந்தரம் பிள்ளை), Vadapathimangalam Thakshinamurthi Pillai (வடபதிமங்கலம் தெட்சிணாமுர்த்தி பிள்ளை) and Needamangalam Shanmugavadivel (நீடமங்கலம் சண்முகவடிவேல்). In Jaffna he accompanied all frontline Nadaswaram Vidwans of his time including N K Pathmanathan and M Panchapikesan. There is some suggestions that he may have had a greater affinity towards the supportive personality, style and skills of Panchapikesan over other Nadaswaram artists. In India, he



A dashing Thakshinamurthi, who practiced a very traditional art form, but kept up with the trends and fashions of his times. The contrast between the two photos represent the two sides of his personality and why he was considered a phenomenon

accompanied several frontline Nadaswaram Vidwans including Thiruvaduthurai Rajaratnam Pillai (திருவாடுதுறை ராஜரத்தினம் பிள்ளை), Karaikudi Arunachalam (காரைக்குடி அருணாச்சலம்), Namagiripettai Krishnan (நாமகிரிப்பேட்டை கிருஷ்ணன்) and the famous Sethuraman-Ponnusamy brothers (சேதுராமன்-பொன்னுசாமி).

In 1961 - at the height of his career, Czech Television journalists were sent to Sri Lanka to film his performance and the magical flow of rhythms from his Thavil. He was also invited to perform at the daughter's wedding of Mr Sivaji Ganeshan - the iconic Tamil film star. Thakshinamurthi was an extremely stylish personality. His popularity, skills, presence and character aided the entire Thavil fraternity to achieve a higher professional standing within the musical world and the ability to charge higher fees for their contributions. It is perhaps for this reason that the name of Thakshinamurthi continues to receive an element of reverence within the entire Isai-Vellalar community both in Sri Lanka and India.

Thakshinamurthi spent a few years of his career Tanjavur in Tamil Nadu and commenting on this period further, the Hindu daily had the following to say "It was during his few years in Tanjavur that Thavil maestro Thakshinamurthi Pillai saw his career peak. It was also in Tanjavur that he got rather disillusioned with the music field" (The Hindu 13th June 2016). Despite his musical genius, popularity and fame, Thakshinamurthi was prone to bouts of severe depression, which first manifested during his stay in Tanjavur and resulted in prolonged breaks in his career. It remains unclear if this was recognised and managed adequately on his return to Sri Lanka. His untimely death at a very young age of 42 in 1975 was a very significant blow to his family, the community of Isai Vellalars in Sri Lanka and the entire world of Carnatic music.

Thakshinamurthi was the father of 5 children and his son Udayasanker is the only descendant who remained in Jaffna to continue the legacy. Commenting on the career of Thakshinamurthi, fellow artist and cousin Yalpanam Ganeshan (யாழ்ப்பாணம் கணேசன்) said "he came, he conquered and he perished" (The Hindu 13th June 2016). Thakshinamurthi continues to live in the minds of all us who loved his music through the life of his son Udayasanker who continues to delight the countless fans of his father across the world by his dedication and skills. Thakshinamurthi's life and death raises important questions that remain very relevant to the present day.

The fact is that even highly successful individuals - who are stars in their chosen fields, and are subjects of public adoration can become victims of their own success. Serious mental health issues such as depression and substance misuse – particularly alcohol or even other recreational drugs are some of the common manifestations of the sheer pressure they are subject to - both by themselves and the wider society. It is the duty of society, elders within these communities/families and the state to cater to these needs. It seems that such support systems are not available even now - in Sri Lanka in general and the Tamil community in particular. Establishing such support systems within the world of art and music is a pressing need and would be a fitting tribute to the musical maestro who "came, conquered and perished"

The future Trajectory of Nathaswaram/ Thavil music: Nathaswaram and Thavil music in Sri Lanka has a rich history of over 250 years and a star-studded landscape. There is no doubt that of all the different art forms, whose origins can be traced to the Indian subcontinent, the proponents of this art form in Sri Lanka matched, and in many



instances, exceeded their Indian counterparts in the skill, understanding and performance. They have been innovative and as a result developed their skills to new heights, while being true to its history, traditions and the spiritual/religious connotations. With a strong Tamil diaspora spread all over the Western hemisphere, a new generation of artists are now on the move displaying their mastery and skills across the globe with suitable honours and financial rewards being bestowed upon them. In meeting the expectations of this new audience, it has been necessary for them to deviate from their traditional playing styles – with greater emphasis on cinema songs and other lighter forms of music. Whether this change in focus will lead to distortion and perhaps diminish this art-form is a question that needs careful consideration and reflection. Whilst change is inevitable, deviation from its traditional base carries the risk of this art form losing the sanctity associated with its practice. This will be a travesty and surely lead to the loss of respect and integrity their

ancestors have so carefully nurtured over centuries. There is therefore a special responsibility placed on the shoulders of the current generation of artists to consider how the changes should be regulated and what aspects of the age-old traditions may be dispensed with. There is no doubt that the Guru-Kulam framework that has sustained this art-form for centuries does not allow students from different backgrounds to learn Nathaswaram and Thavil. As members of the traditional music families are subject to the economic currents of migration, the practice of music must be made available to all those who seek to learn and perhaps the Guru-Kulam framework needs to be adapted (not necessarily eliminated) to accommodate these changing needs.

The current generation of performers stand on the shoulders of artistic giants and hence will surely be able to see beyond the horizons of their ancestors. In this context, it is very reassuring to see that artists such as Panchamurti Kumaran, P S Balamurugan, T Udayasanker, P S Senthil Nathan and Vipooran who are constantly experimenting with the transformation have, in general, stood broadly within the Carnatic musical traditions while accommodating the requests for more popular cinema music. The critics of this transformation must remember the age old saying ‘பழையன கழிதலும் புதியன புகுதலும் வழுவுல’ (the loss of old practices and the adoption of new ones is not a mistake) - the Nadaswaram/Thavil music cannot be the exception.

To be continued in the next edition.

Dharma, Justice and Human Rights



BY:

Jeevan Thiagarajah

Former Governor Northern Province/
Former Member Commissioner
Election Commission.

Dharma is a systematic Sanskrit concept that includes traditions, obligation, morals, laws, order, and justice. It was a unique concept of dharma that kept checks and balances on sovereign officials and prevented them from becoming autocratic and anarchist. It also provided the common man with a protective shield against the dictatorship of sovereign officials. Ordinary citizens had more privileges and fewer responsibilities relative

to the state's highest officials. The greater the authority, the less his privileges were, and the more extensive his responsibilities became.

Dharmaśāstras or Righteous Science, are the collections of rules of life. Religion has always played a crucial role in the advancement of human rights, particularly in the advancement of human dignity (Harees-2012). Human rights defined in Vedic literature tend to be fundamental, unchangeable, and place a greater emphasis on human obligations than on human rights.

The world came up with the high ideals of liberty, freedom, and fraternity, during the French revolution (Setzer-2013). These three principles are enshrined in almost every democratic constitution in the world.

Young Hindus are schooled on concepts of Dharma. Buddhists from a different prism. Equally Jurists such as Upendra Baxi wrote about, 'Taking suffering seriously' to Justice Bhagwati and Justice Krishna Iyer who took the Supreme Court to the poor, the underclass and those discriminated. Pakistan had Justice

Dorab Patel, Asma Jehangir, and I.A. Rehman. In Sri Lanka we had S. Nadesan Q.C. This is what was said in tribute at the Supreme Court on his passing. Reference to Death of late Mr. Nadesan, Queens Counsel made in Sri Lanka Supreme Court in Ceremonial Sitting at Hulftsdorp, Colombo, Sri Lanka on 16 January 1987.

"...Nadesan was a front-rank lawyer who was a crusader for human rights and an aggressive champion of social justice...He will be gratefully remembered by many a person coming from various strata of our society. The Civil Rights Movement has lost one of its founder members and an ardent human rights activist and the country has lost a pre-eminent lawyer with a social conscience..." **Sri Lanka Chief Justice S. Sharvananda**

When one provides free legal aid to the vulnerable one sees all manner of injustices. Combine with visits to Prisons, Police Stations, places of detention, sites of atrocities and courts one is informed of inhuman wrongs. These are but a few instances and contexts which influence once belief in the importance of human rights.

The Responsibility to Protect in Sri Lanka

Due to the vagaries of our history in the past 4-5 decades human rights of citizens has been a topic of debate and discussion and even censure.

The principle of the responsibility to protect is based upon the underlying premise that sovereignty entails a responsibility to protect all populations from mass atrocity crimes and human rights violations. This passage is mentioned in the context of an introduction of why the state is held responsible to protect our citizens.

What are the three rules of sovereignty?

Domestic sovereignty – actual control over a state exercised by an authority organized within this state.

Interdependence sovereignty – actual control of movement across the state's borders.

International legal sovereignty – formal recognition by other sovereign states.

The sovereign state's responsibility and accountability to both domestic and external constituencies must be affirmed as interconnected principles of the national and international order. *Such a normative code is anchored in the assumption that in order to be legitimate sovereignty must demonstrate responsibility.*

Sovereignty is a political concept that refers to a dominant power or supreme authority. In a monarchy, supreme power resides in the sovereign, such as a king or queen. In modern democracies, sovereign power rests with the people and is exercised through representative bodies such as Congress or Parliament.

In Sri Lanka Laws and policies are guided by the Directive Principles of State Policy found in our Constitution.

K. Mathan in FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS VS DIRECTIVE PRINCIPLES OF STATE POLICY: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF SRI LANKAN POSITION WITH INDIA has looked at the applicability. 'The Supreme Court of Sri Lanka emphasized the importance of directive principles of state policy in the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution Bill. Although it is expressly declared in the Constitution that the directive principles

and fundamental duties 'do not confer or impose legal rights or obligations and are not enforceable in any Court or Tribunal' Courts have linked the Directive Principles to the public trust doctrine and have stated that these principles should guide state functionaries in the exercise of their powers.

WHAT ARE DIRECTIVE PRINCIPLES?

Directive principles are principles intended to guide the State when making policy. Here are some examples:

'[Article] 27(2): The State is pledged to establish in Sri Lanka a democratic socialist society, the objectives of which include:

- The full realization of the fundamental rights and freedoms of all persons;
- The promotion of the welfare of the People by securing and protecting as effectively as it may, a social order in which justice (social, economic and political) shall guide all the institutions of the national life;
- The realization by all citizens of adequate standard of living for themselves and their families, including adequate food, clothing and housing, the continuous improvement of living conditions and the full enjoyment of leisure and social and cultural opportunities, etc. etc.

27(7): The State shall eliminate economic and social privilege and disparity, and the exploitation of man by man or by the State.

27(8): The State shall ensure that the operation of the economic system does not result in a concentration of wealth and the means of production to the common detriment.

27(9): The State shall ensure social security and welfare.'

I argue human rights is not an abstract notion or a fashionable statement. It requires serious consideration. The failure has serious consequences. It goes beyond the traditional understanding of illegal arrest, detention, torture or disappearances. The canvas as seen is far wider.

Protecting citizens

I doubt if the Human Rights Commission vets or filters cabinet decisions for compliance of the directive principles. The cabinet secretary is unlikely to advise the cabinet of the need to do so either. The Public Services Commission needs to ask if its job is only the removal, appointment or transfer of public officials. The Administrative Services Tribunal does a sterling job of protection. The Governor at the Province has a serious task of ensuring 'protection'. The absence such executive responses leads to violations. The Northern Provincial Public Services Commission with the incumbent Governor then as Chairman was given a new set of objectives to fill gaps seen in the protection and promotion of development of the provincial cadre. A particular feature was seen in this text, 'The Provincial Public Service was informed of the intention to do so in December and specifically to, to promote the wellbeing of Provincial Public Service Officers of the Northern Province with career development paths, protection from discrimination, harassment including sexual harassment, victimization, witness protection of whistle blowers, timely transfers, supporting access to statutory claims, leave, allowances, access to fundamental facilities for sanitation, safe water, partaking of meals, safety of personal belongings and official data.'

1. The graph below are statistics from the human rights commission of complaints received since 2010 in the Northern Province.

1. Personal Liberty: 2. Other Civil & Political Rights: 3. Employment 4. Education 5. State Welfare Services 6. Infrastructure Utilities 7. Complaints Relating to Voter Registration 8. Complaints about Inactions of Govt. Entities 9. Child Rights 10. Rights of Differently-abled

ඩබ්ලිව්. ඒ. ශ්‍රී. එස්. විජේසූරිය
 තොරතුරු හිමිකරු
 ශ්‍රී ලංකා මහජන විද්‍යාත්මක ප්‍රකාශන සභාව



2. Violation of the Constitution- The most well-known but sad abuse of a right was the illegal removal and subsequent assumption for one day in office of the 47th Chief Justice no less, Dr. Shirani Bandaranayke.

The Govt explained the reinstatement in this manner: Earlier in the day, President Maithripala Sirisena had issued two letters. One letter was dispatched to de facto Chief Justice Mohan Pieris. The other was issued to de jure Chief Justice Shirani Bandaranayke. In the letter to Pieris, President Sirisena said that his purported appointment had no legal validity and was therefore void. The letter said, there was no vacancy created for the position of Chief Justice because Shirani Bandaranayke was not removed in accordance with the terms of the constitutional provisions by an address of Parliament. Pieris was therefore asked to take note that he was not the lawful Chief Justice of Sri Lanka.

The second letter to Bandaranayke was a copy of the first. It also included a covering

letter, signed by President Sirisena, informing the ousted Chief Justice that Pieris had been informed that his appointment was void. The letter asked her to kindly resume duties as lawful Chief Justice of Sri Lanka. Copies of the letters were also issued to the Supreme Court Registrar.

Govt. urged to reveal observations of indep. Panel (Daily Mirror

13/1/2013) It is learnt that the committee appointed to look into the charges against ousted Chief Justice Dr. Shirani Bandaranayke comprised Professor Mark Cooray, former Central Bank Deputy Governor Ranee Jayamaha, former Parliament Secretary General Dhammika Kithulegoda and Consortium of Humanitarian Agencies Chairman Jeevan Thiagarajah. It is reliably learnt that certain panellists in their individual recommendations submitted to presidential secretary Lalith Weeratunge had expressed reservations of varying degrees on the charges. My view was carried in the Daily Ft on 14 th January 2015.

3. Violation of citizens rights- *Human Rights Report: Methsevena State House of Detention, Gangodawila, and Human Rights Report: Methsevena State House of Detention, Gangodawila, March and July 2004.*

Detention of Children-Presently 16 children younger than five years of age 27 are living in detention at Methsevena. Most of the children have no other guardian willing to care for them. Although it is preferable to keep young children with a parent, their rights are gravely violated when they are forced into detention. The children are negatively impacted because they lack access

to a regular paediatrician, vital vaccinations, sanitary conditions and age-appropriate social interaction.

Detention of Women with Mental Health Problems-

Women with mental health problems live in a separate ward in the old building and receive monthly clinics conducted by Angoda Mental Hospital for the 73 women with psychological problems. Most of these women have been detained for non-punishable behaviours, listed as “mental illness,” “deaf,” “cripple” and “epilepsy.” The women with mental health problems, particularly the women with serious mental

illness, face specific problems in detention. First, the psychiatric ward is plagued by the worst living conditions in the facility. Most women wear filthy, torn clothing. Small rooms house up to twenty women, and many are lacking bedding and lighting. Second, the women lack necessary mental health and medical services. A monthly clinic is grossly inadequate to address the specific issues faced by women with mental illness. Third, the detainees with mental illness have nothing to do. Most wander around the ward or sleep. Fourth, the detainees with mental health problems lack adequate supervision because the institution does not provide a regular supervisor in the psychiatric ward. Instead, other detainees, unpaid for their work, serve as caretakers for the women with mental illness.

As a result of the surprise visits to

Methsevana State House of Detention, Gangodawila, the Commission urges the following: 1. immediately address the problems associated with detention without the proper court mandate, including no-date detainees, detainees held after their sentence, the refusal to release detainees without a guardian and the detention of women who have not committed punishable offences. a. Resolve the discrepancy regarding the definition of vagrant in the Vagrant's Ordinance and the Houses of Detention Ordinance.

Note: The report catalogues horrendous abuse of rights of vulnerable citizens. What is required is penalties on those responsible, payment of damages and restorative justice for the victims. In this instance, it did not occur even 10 years after the report!

4. Accountability for lapses leading to death, injury and destruction to property following Easter Sunday Blasts in April 2019.

I write as a citizen. Triggered by the story of Kieran Alexander Shafritz de Zoysa, an eleven (11) year old boy who died in one of the blasts and is half SL with a SL mother. His profile is attached. 18th June 2019

a. The State is obliged to protect the life and limb of its citizens whilst they also have a reasonable expectation of protection of their belongings. The 21st April blast we know resulted in death and destruction. Given information in the public domain with malice to none has the Actg IGP and /or National Police Commission sought to inquire into responsibility within the Police, lapses if any and consequences for any lapses? If not why not?

b. Several days after the blasts organized violence by mobs was seen directed at Muslim owned properties. Has the Actg. IGP and /or National Police Commission sought to inquire into responsibility within the Police, lapses if any and consequences for any lapses? If not why not?

c. Following from (a) and (b) were any employee of the Police Department obstructed from performing his/her duties leading to the outcomes raised above and if yes, what protection can or should be provided to prevent recurrence? If not why not?

Note: Submission drew no response from the Chairman of HRC! Subsequently we had a plethora of reports, cases and determinations.

5. Innocent man suffered over Kadirgamar assassination

I write with reference to a web-based article seen attached titled, “Innocent man suffered over Kadirgamar assassination “. The web link is http://newshub.lk/en/2019/07/02/innocent-man-suffered-over-kadirgamar-as-sassination/?fbclid=IwAR3yh7o7zZ3TSHXB5mkRjb0Y7Y07reGgrbJVvYHfEjoH_ixgGkYEODLrI34

Is it within the purview of the HRC to:

- Go over the case record and potentially seek compensation for the surviving family members?
- Define a method whereby prisoners who are either in remand or have been sentenced wrongfully are legally protected?

Note: Eerie silence was the response of the Chairman HRC!

6. Revisiting to remedy improprieties in disciplinary inquiries

Matters under consideration of the first and second preliminary inquiries are broadly different. First report was not commissioned or for the benefit of the (redacted). Hence their satisfaction or dissatisfaction is immaterial to conclude and act on the first preliminary inquiry. Taking into consideration (2-4) above, the process has compromised the objectivity and legality of both preliminary inquiries.

The first inquiry was out of time nor has time been sought for extension nor a bar from Court to proceed. Commencement of a second preliminary inquiry against the petitioner connecting it with the first

preliminary of the above mentioned whilst the first remains without conclusion is arbitrary and illegal on the face of law. The Governor cannot prima facie knowingly accede nor be party to breaking the law. The Governor thus squashes the boards, proceedings and findings of both preliminary inquiry processes conducted under the aegis of MoH, NP.

Note: The Secretary of the line ministry did not act on the letter sent. The AG declined to appear for the Governor since the findings were different to instructions they had received previously. The question thus is the AG and the Governor legally bound to do what is right or not?! The Governor chose to do so.

7. Continuous violation of rights Letter of Governor to S/PSC

HRC regional coordinator submitted 35 observations on 2021.05.06 and the response from NPC is pending. The Governor withdraws forthwith the Charge sheet since tenets of natural has been absent, noticed by

the PSC, and requires the Chief Secretary to do so parallelly with the relevant line agency with notice towithin 7 days.

The Governor seeks the intervention of HRC to lay suit and recover damages as deemed necessary on behalf of..... The Governor is of the view several senior officials have colluded and acted in a monstrous

unaccountable manner in concert, at the behest of one original complainant for his personal interest. The report of the HRC makes for horrendous reading on account of the outrageous findings of facts therein. The PSC should consider imposing penalties on serving public servants giving consideration to the report of the HRC as well as docking the pension in part as damages, if possible, of those retired who acted in concert on this matter.

The aggrieved party (redacted) must recover her promotion rights.

The Chief Secretary preceding the current office holder has acted in an ugly, vindictive manner so has potentially some members of the incumbent N/PPSC. It must not be repeated. It has brought total dishonor on the Northern Provincial Public Service which had in 1987 a scintillating persona and should rise again to become the gold standard in Provincial Public Service.

This disgraceful episode the incumbent Governor will stamp out forthwith, whilst believing senior officials who could have shown courage to do the right thing had not done so to date. The direction of the Governor is a consequence of their inaction and indecisiveness. Furthermore, grotesque elements of misplaced male chauvinism is found in the record on this matter.

Copy: 1. Chairman, Public Services Commission; 2. Chairman- HRC; 3. Chief Secretary- NPC; 4. DCS, Admin NPC; 6. Mrs.(redacted)- Sri Lanka Agriculture Service, Grade III; 7. Regional Coordinator HRC- Mannar

Submission of the victim to Chairman / HRC

The Human Rights Commission in inquiry reference has in Paragraphs 6,7,8,9,10,11,12, 13,14,15,16,17,18,19,20,22,23,24,27,28,29,30 ,31,32,33 and 34 made reference to the sum total of victimization and harassment based on personal prejudice tantamount to violation of my fundamental rights.

The Hon. Governor independently has drawn the conclusion that tenets of natural justice were violated. Shown previously in Annex I. Hence, he had forthwith withdrawn the fabricated charge sheet prepared by the Chief Secretary.

The HRC has in the conclusions of the inquiry report found victimization based on personal grounds by senior officials against me. The Hon. Governor has withdrawn the Charge sheet. Administrative Tribunal has accepted the merits and content of the letter and directions of the Hon. Governor. The PSC has acted in violation of my fundamental rights by reissuing the same charge sheet seen in Annex II. I was thus victimized and tormented once more for no reason. The PSC has acted on a false set of documents produced by the NPC where two senior officials have been named as the principle offending parties, where their inconsistencies and lies have been named and exposed by the HRC. The Hon Governor has requested HRC and the PSC to act against the said officials. In fact, the PSC should act against the said officials without victimizing me the aggrieved party.

Note: The HRC concluded its inquiry in May 2021. To date no order has been made. The details are replete with horrendous misconduct, victimization, persecution and the continuous violation of the rights of the victim. The HRC is cognizant of the details since 2021.

8. Example of seeking Counsel from the AG to remedy violations (Letter from Governor to State Counsel)

Has the NP treated the complainant fairly or unfairly? If not how so? As I understand group of laborers struck work. Has the reason been looked into, when, by whom, what was the outcome, when? Did the right person look into it? Why was Mrs. S. brought into the inquiry? Was that a correct decision? PPSC directed she be temporarily attached to another institution/post? Was she told or not? If not why not? Did she not find only through a RTI application? On what basis

did CLG appeal to PPSC? Should S/LG if at all have done so or should Deputy Chief Secretary Admin have done so? If errors have been made to the detriment of the complainant should the salary due during the VOP be recovered from the DCS Admin & CLG? Sick leave taken was incorrect. Salary cannot be given for that period. Did the appeal mechanism work fairly, on time in this instance? PPSC had taken 3 decisions on one individual. Should Governor call for explanation? Are PPSC members personally liable or immune from prosecution? I am inclined to order payment of salary during VOP if I can full justify it was wrong. Can you assist with the above?

9. Availing of services of the HRC in the Northern Province

The Governor wishes to propose a few collaborative Suo moto inquiries in the province if the Commission were to concur. E.g. Involuntary warding of those mentally ill, paucity of transport services by the SLTB in particular for school children; With no malice to employees its best staff rotate out of stations every 5 years at the outer limit as is the public service norm to ensure optimal,

swift delivery of services and relief where required for complainants; The Governor desires allocating plots of land to the poor soon. Criteria to follow. Services of HRC to adjudicate on the fairness or exclusion of any, if such complaints were to be received would assist immeasurably. Consideration is kindly sought in principle for the above.

Note: The letter addressed to the Chairman HRC drew no response!

Conclusions

The scope of the advice tendered in the directive principles to guide government policy is wide ranging in nature. The execution of the guide through policy is the delivery of the promises to citizens by the state through the Constitution.

In very many instances the execution and delivery of justice falls far short of the

required level. Officers of the Government need to be protected too if they are to act without fear of repercussions. Organs of government seem insufficiently sensitive, become accessories to violations by default due to inaction, seem enmeshed in actions which preserve the status quo and lastly lets down the state in its obligation to protect citizens.

Tamil Leaders Criticize MP Selvaraj's Stance on Northern-Eastern Merger



Remarks made by MP Kitnan Selvaraj, a first-time Tamil parliamentarian representing the National People's Power (NPP) from the Badulla District, have drawn criticism from political figures in the Northern Province. Selvaraj, a former estate worker and long-time advocate for plantation communities, referred to the proposal to merge the Northern and Eastern Provinces as an idea rooted in "Tamil extremism" during a recent parliamentary session. He also rejected calls for a separate Tamil state, prompting

backlash from some Tamil political leaders.

Selvaraj's comments were perceived by critics as dismissive of longstanding Tamil demands for political autonomy and the historical grievances of Tamil communities. Among those who responded was Saba Kugathas, a former member of the Northern Provincial Council and a representative of the Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF).



In a statement, Kugathas accused Selvaraj of undermining the broader Tamil struggle for political rights and self-governance. He described the remarks as "reckless" and argued that they ignored the sacrifices made by Tamil civilians and others in pursuit of those goals.

"MP Selvaraj's comments fail to recognize the historical realities of Tamil settlements in the North and East. Instead of focusing on the pressing issues faced by the plantation workers who elected him, he appears to be echoing Sinhala nationalist rhetoric in Parliament," Kugathas said.

Kugathas also drew attention to ongoing challenges in the plantation sector, where workers continue to face low wages and poor living conditions. He urged Selvaraj to prioritize the concerns of his constituency over making divisive statements regarding Tamil rights.

Referencing the historical context of Tamil governance in the Northern and Eastern Provinces and the Indo-Lanka Accord, which recognized the merger of the two provinces, Kugathas challenged Selvaraj to better understand the complexities of the issue. He criticized the use of terms like "Tamil extremism" to describe the merger proposal, describing it as an approach that risks fueling further division.

The separation of the Northern and Eastern Provinces was the result of a court ruling initiated by the JVP, a party historically associated with Sinhala nationalist sentiments," Kugathas said. "Labeling the merger proposal as 'Tamil extremism' is not only misleading but also risks exacerbating existing divisions," he added.



THE HUNT

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

Translated by:
Eḷuttukkiṇiyavan
(எழுத்துக்கினியவன்)

The sky was overcast. Kādaṇ stood on the wooden watchtower and let his eyes roam. They swiftly scanned around Kusavai lake and surfaced on the east by the orchard of Indian laurel trees. The orchard seems to be in a trance without even a leaf stirring. Even the cranes and tiny birds that would fly away at the slightest provocation, screaming bloody

murder, seem to be fast asleep.
His eyes turned their gaze towards the sky.
Not even a star glittered. The waning moon
was bathing in the waters of the Mahāveli.

If the overcast sky would permit a drizzle
soon, Kādaṇ would definitely score a hunt.

In his mindscape a herd of deer galloped away.
Kādaṇ folded his arms, unfolded them again,
and shook them vigorously. He turned towards
Teacher:

“Teacher, get up; the morning star has risen.”

“How is it this cold? It seems it would even
beat the cold spells in our Kandy town.”

“If we get a rainy season downpour here, your
Kandy cannot hold a candle!” Kādaṇ said
proudly.

Kandy Teacher warmed his arms and legs in
the fire.

In a little while, the *koṇḍal* wind began to
blow from the east. Having let it carry away
their human scent, they started circling
Kusavai lake in a northeasterly direction.

Kādaṇ walked swiftly, Kandy Teacher jogging
to keep up with him.

There were only two people in the village who
could walk like Kādaṇ. One was Tiger Sēhu,
and the other was the government functionary
for the farms in the village, Nūhu.

The thorns along the way that dared to prick
Kādaṇ’s soles were immediately blunted with
a “snick”. The skin on his sole was taut and
rigid like the skin on the neck of a fully grown
sambar deer. Teacher kept running behind
Kādaṇ, occasionally lifting a foot to sooth its
sole being ravaged by thorns.

They both had the same thought, ‘Today we
must find game meat to grill.’ Both were





on the same quest. Kādaṇ resumed the conversation.

“Can I sleep just because it is night, Teacher? All day I have to herd the cows like a cow myself. In the evening, I have to go to the lake shore to catch fish for the boss — if there is no fish, I have to at least buy him some eggs cheaply. Occasionally, someone leaves town after being transferred elsewhere. On those days, I must grill them wild boar,” he hawked and spat the phlegm out.

His flashlight spotted something and focused on it. Against the pitch-black backdrop tiny green marbles glittered. ‘It is a herd of deer...’ his tongue curled inwards immediately.

“Chee! That is a just a bird, Teacher. Everyone talks about truth and justice at the beginning. As time goes by, every donkey shows its true colors. Among them Senanayake is the worst. They ogle at our women cutting grass. Our women also grin and giggle at them shamelessly,” Kādaṇ said disgustedly.

Teacher had a sudden realization.

He remembered the gossip he had heard about Kādaṇ’s wife.

‘Who knows what the truth is!’ ‘If we chatter like this, the deer will scramble! Kādaṇ must have had a little bit of Pāthamuthu rāthā’s ganja, perhaps.’ Teacher’s thoughts scrambled back into their shells like startled turtles.

“Teacher, let us warm ourselves a little at Puḷiyadipattu and circle Mōttāṇ lake. We’ll find something there.”

Teacher let out a “muh” as he shivered in the cold.

“Look Teacher, the tamarind tree has fruited. We need deer bones to cook with this tamarind,” Kādaṇ drooled at the thought.

“Dēy! Hanifā kākā, are you so cold? If you move any closer, you will be on fire yourself.”

Hanifā kākā sat up when he heard Kādaṇ’s voice. He shook his hands vigorously and alternated his hands and feet over the flames

to warm up.

“Do we have any sugar? Let’s make some tea,” said Kādaṇ.

“How long since we set eyes on sugar!” exclaimed Hanifā kākā.

“Teacher! Get up. If we lounge around the fire like this, the job won’t get done,” Kādaṇ was keen to get on with the hunt.

“Kādeṇ! Go look in Mōttān lake. When I was herding the cattle back home during the day, I saw that a sambar deer had been shot there. If you get lucky, don’t forget us,” Hanifā kākā rubbed his hands as he spoke. “Today, I came here because of Teacher. He is being transferred out. He is the one who taught our children the alphabet, at least. Our people didn’t even give him a farewell meal. If it had been an MP, they would have bought a couple of bottles, and roasted a wild deer.”

He slung the rifle over his shoulder and started walking, with Kandy Teacher following at a trot.

“Kādar! It is too cold. The cartilage on my nose is crying.”

“Yes, yes! Don’t make a noise,” Kādaṇ warned him as he scanned the lake shore with his flashlight.

The darkness enveloped and



swallowed the rays of light. A herd of deer that jumped up and scrambled was caught in the light. The next instant the “bang!” of a gunshot shook the entire area.

The wounded deer desperately hobbled towards the cover of the bush, dragging its hooves. Teacher caught its feet and folded it, towards qibla, the direction towards Mecca.

As the lips muttered ‘Bismillah’, a knife was sunk into the deer’s neck.

After a few minutes, Kādaṇ sharpened his knife and began skinning the deer. In his hands, the knife danced over the deer’s body like an artist’s paintbrush.

“Teacher! I knew already! That mangy dog at the house by the tamarind tree is a lucky charm. If we encounter it on our way to the hunt, we will definitely succeed.”

The Teacher was panting, exhausted from carrying game meat. He was sweating profusely, despite the morning chill.

Daylight was slowly breaking.

“Teacher! Do you not have any muttāsi either? If I go home, I must have some tea, Teacher.”



“Why don’t we go to the mosque? You have to smoke the meat for us anyway.”

“I can’t, Teacher. I will go home first, give some meat to the boss, sign in on the attendance register, and will come around by about eight.”

Carrying his share of the meat and the deer’s head, Kādaṇ turned the corner by the tamarind tree.

“Teacher! Be careful. Now is the time when elephants return to the jungle,” Kādaṇ’s words focused Teacher’s mind.

As Kādaṇ neared his home in the farm’s personnel quarters, he heard something following him. It was the mangy dog from the house by the tamarind tree. It was wagging its tail vigorously.

“Come, come, let’s go home.”

The dog followed him, smacking its lips.

When he reached home, he hung the meat hook on the barbed-wire fence. He wanted to relieve himself first ...

As he set foot on the veranda, the voices from within the house penetrated his ears. His heart was like the wounded deer, desperately hobbling towards the cover of the bush, dragging its hooves.

“Get up and get going. He will come soon.”

He felt as if a knife was sunk into his neck.

His stomach churned, even though it was still very early in the morning.

He hocked spit as hard as he could, and spat it out with disgust

He turned around.

There – the mangy dog from the house by the tamarind tree had savaged the meat hanging from the barbed wire fence.

For Donations:

Full Name :

JAFFNA MONITOR PUBLICATIONS

Bank Name :

National Development Bank PLC

Branch Name and Address:

No.30, KKS Road, Chunnakam, Jaffna

Account Number:

111000221437

SWIFT Code:

NDBSLKLX

Bank Address:

No. 40, Nawam Mawatha, Colombo 2

CONTACT US

We value your feedback, questions, and insights. Feel free to get in touch with us via the methods below.

Email : hellojaffnamonitor@gmail.com

Phone : +94715418220

Editorial Inquiries : For story pitches, press releases, and other editorial matters,
please email hellojaffnamonitor@gmail.com

Advertising Inquiries : Interested in advertising with us?
Contact our advertising department at hellojaffnamonitor@gmail.com