



Seeds of Change: Why
Sri Lanka Must Embrace
Private Medical Education

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Governance, Not Stunts, Will Save Jaffna



Jaffna MP Ilangumaran of the ruling National People's Power (NPP) recently orchestrated an ill-conceived stunt that seemed straight out of an amateur Tamil action movie. Late one night, with an air of self-styled heroism, the MP chased down a lorry, overtook it with dramatic flair, and forced it to the nearest police station, accusing it of illegally transporting limestone. Yet, in an ironic twist worthy of a comedy, the vehicle was found to be lawfully transporting gravel for a reputable business in Jaffna.

Had the NPP still been in opposition, such antics might have been perceived as a bold attempt to raise awareness or draw attention to an issue—noisy but ultimately harmless political theatrics. However, Ilangumaran is now part of the ruling government, and his actions carry a different weight, raising uncomfortable questions. Does he lack confidence in his government's ability to address illegal mining through proper legislation? Or is he implying that the police force under his party's rule is so ineffective that MPs must resort to dramatic stunts to enforce the law themselves?

Adding to the confusion, the Cabinet Minister of Fisheries and the NPP's lead figure in Jaffna, Ramalingam Chandrasekar, commented on the incident. Initially claiming to have warned Ilangumaran not to act in such a manner, Chandrasekar later stated, "Now I feel what he did was right" (loosely translated). This shift in stance from a senior Cabinet minister raises an even more troubling question: Does Chandrasekar also lack faith in his government's ability to take tangible action against illegal resource exploitation? If so, is he suggesting that every MP should take matters into their own hands and stage their own stunts?

Instead of grandstanding, Ilangumaran and his party should focus on drafting and implementing laws to stop illegal sand mining, mineral exploitation, and limestone quarrying—issues that are eroding Jaffna's environmental and social fabric. Their failure to act decisively suggests a troubling lack of political will or administrative capability.

Studies consistently demonstrate that Jaffna and the Tamil-majority regions of Northern and Eastern Sri Lanka face a growing environmental crisis. This crisis stems from the uncontrolled exploitation of natural resources, including sand smuggling, mineral extraction, and limestone quarrying. These practices pose a significant threat to the region's environmental integrity and long-term sustainability.

While the Mines and Minerals Act of 1992 provides a regulatory framework, its enforcement is crippled by political interference and a "sand mafia" empowered by relaxed licensing and environmental compliance. This has led to the depletion of Jaffna's crucial limestone aquifer, jeopardizing the region's long-term water security. A study by the University of Jaffna's agricultural department confirms this depletion, with data showing a concerning negative water balance.

Beyond depletion, the quality of both surface and groundwater is compromised. Saltwater intrusion contaminates drinking water and agricultural sources, while increased turbidity and sedimentation harm aquatic life and disrupt delicate ecosystems. The lack of proper Environmental Impact Mitigation (EIM) measures further compounds the damage.

Jaffna's future cannot be entrusted to theatrical politicians who prioritize stunts over substance. The region needs leaders who grasp the seriousness of the situation and are committed to addressing it through sound governance, not amateur dramatics. The exploitation of natural resources highlights a governance crisis that lays bare the failures of those in power.

It is time for the NPP to demonstrate that it is more than just a protest movement. As the ruling party, it carries the historic distinction of being the first Sinhala-led political party to gain significant support in the North and East, and technically, it has become the ruling party in every district in the region except Batticaloa. This unprecedented trust from a region that has traditionally aligned with Tamil nationalist politics highlights the hope and expectations placed upon the NPP to deliver meaningful change.

The party now holds both the responsibility and the power to address the deep-rooted issues plaguing the region. The people of Jaffna deserve more than empty promises and performative politics. They deserve tangible, long-term solutions that prioritize their welfare over short-term political gains and media spectacles.

If the NPP fails to rise to the occasion, it risks squandering the historic mandate it has received. Anything less than decisive, impactful action would not only be a missed opportunity but also a betrayal of the trust that the people of Jaffna have placed in their elected representatives. The time for rhetoric has passed; the time for effective governance is now.

Warm regards,

கணியன் பூங்குன்றன்
Kaniyan Pungundran
Editor-Jaffna Monitor

Cover:

File photo of SAIM students protesting for their right to education

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Protesters rally against SAIM: Demonstrators demand the abolition of private medical education in Sri Lanka during a heated protest in Colombo.

Seeds of Change: Why Sri Lanka Must Embrace Private Medical Education

Spring always arrives, machan

■
கணியன் பூங்குன்றன்
Kaniyan Pungundran

Dr. Shane Halpe is a dedicated family physician, a Registrar in MD Family Medicine, and a Lecturer at the Postgraduate Institute of Medicine, University of Moratuwa. An alumnus of SAIM (South Asian Institute of Technology and Medicine)—a now-defunct private medical university that faced relentless opposition—he shared a deeply personal and painful story with Jaffna Monitor. His narrative sheds light on the inhumane and prejudiced facets of Sri Lanka's education

system, the hostile stance of the powerful Government Medical Officers' Association (GMOA), and the exclusionary mindset of local medical students who believe they should hold a monopoly on local medical education. These entrenched attitudes have long stifled the establishment of private medical colleges (PMCs) in the country—a reality Dr. Shane Halpe and his peers endured firsthand.

"My journey at SAIMT began in 2009, right after I completed my London A-Levels. From as far back as I can remember, medicine was my calling—a dream born from passion, not pressure. There was no parental push, no family tradition to uphold, and no societal expectations to fulfill. Coming from a family with no medical background, this was entirely my own choice, driven by a deep fascination with the field and a desire to make a difference," Dr. Halpe began.

As a London A-Level graduate, Sri Lanka's state universities did not have a place for him. His choices were clear: pursue medicine abroad or take a leap of faith by joining



Dr. Shane Halpe

SAITM, a newly established private medical university in Sri Lanka. He chose SAIMT—not only because it allowed him to stay close to his family but also because he believed in investing in his country and contributing to its future. "Staying home meant that every step I took would benefit not only my career but also the place I call home."



State university students protest against SAIMT, confronting security forces.

From the very beginning, SAIMT students encountered challenges they could never have anticipated. "The mudslinging and negative media coverage were relentless. SAIMT was disparaged as a 'factory of fake medical degrees.' We were labeled as purchasers of fraudulent qualifications, branded as unqualified students, and even accused of being unfit to qualify as healthcare cleaners, let alone as medical professionals.

The accusations were relentless. Dr. Shane continued, "We were dismissed as privileged rich kids, with no regard for the sacrifices our families made to support us. The slander infiltrated everyday life, and even the public was unkind. Relatives at social events, like weddings or funerals, would question the credibility of my education. The stigma was suffocating. Yet, I held onto one belief: my passion for medicine and my commitment to making a difference would prevail over the negativity.

As time went on, the challenges grew. Delays in their studies and a lack of access to proper clinical training facilities were constant hurdles. "In 2011, we went to Homagama Base Hospital for clinical training, only to be chased out by trade union actions. We tried to commence our clinical training at Nawaloka Hospital, a private institution, but our stay lasted only a few days before we were forced out again."

The difficulties were overwhelming. "There were moments when I questioned everything—my choice of medicine, my aspirations, even my purpose in life. As a Catholic, I sometimes considered becoming a priest. There were days of intense despair, and thoughts of giving up crossed my mind more times than I could admit. Some friends felt the same, and the weight of it all occasionally led to dark, even suicidal thoughts. But one

incident stands out, a memory that still stings deeply."

"On August 17, 2017, a group of us SAIMT students eagerly traveled to Kandy to attend the prestigious College of Surgeons Sessions. We had registered, paid our fees, and enjoyed the enriching lectures on the first day. But the next day, August 18, shattered our enthusiasm."

As we entered the conference hall for the second day, Dr. Shane continued, a senior official from the College of Surgeons stopped us. "The moment he realized we were from SAIMT, his tone shifted," Dr. Halpe recalled bitterly. "'You are not allowed to participate,' he said curtly, citing an unspecified 'problem' from the previous day.

Stunned, the students sought clarification, but their polite inquiries were met with hostility. "Despite being registered participants—some of us already pre-interns—we were told our presence would 'disrupt' the conference. It wasn't just rejection; it was humiliation. We were treated like Outcasts, as if we didn't belong. When we pressed further, they offered a refund, but their tone left no doubt: we were unwelcome."

With no choice but to leave, the students exited the Grand Kandyan Hotel. "That incident made headlines, but the damage was done. We were denied entry simply because we were from SAIMT. The GMOA and state university unions called us 'fake degree buyers,' vilifying us at every turn. But here's the irony," Dr. Halpe added with a wry smile.

Fast forward to September 12, 2024: one of my batchmates, now a surgical registrar, delivered an oration at the same prestigious College of Surgeons Sessions—the very event that had once humiliated us."



SAITM students during a silent protest

He continued with pride, "Today, there are 55 postgraduate trainees among SAIMT alumni, excelling in specialties like surgery, general medicine, pediatrics, gynecology, and nearly every postgraduate field. They said we were unqualified, but we proved them wrong. Not only did we compete with them—we excelled.

Dr. Shane, his eyes twinkling with the wisdom gleaned from life's trials, leaned forward. "A few years ago," he began, his voice resonating with quiet strength, "I encountered a parable by Ajahn Brahmavamso, a revered Buddhist monk. In his book *Who Ordered This Truckload of Dung?* he tells the story of someone faced with a pile of manure dumped at their doorstep. Two choices arise: wallow in misfortune or use it to fertilize their garden."

A thoughtful pause hung in the air as Dr. Shane, soon to be a family physician consultant, connected the parable to his own experiences. "This story resonated deeply

with us SAIMT students," he confided to Jaffna Monitor, "especially given the relentless negativity we faced. Instead of succumbing to despair, my peers and I transformed every insult and obstacle into fuel for our growth. We alchemized each pile of dung thrown at us into fertilizer, enriching our lives and blossoming despite adversity."

His expression shifted, a hint of defiant optimism glimmering in his eyes. "And as the great poet Pablo Neruda so eloquently stated," he continued, his voice rising with conviction, "You can cut all the flowers, but you cannot keep spring from coming." A warm smile spread across his face, a touch of strength in his tone. "They tried every possible way to suppress us, to stifle our progress—named us, shamed us—but, machan," he paused, the smile growing wider, "they cannot prevent the inevitable blossoming of our potential. Spring always arrives, machan."



SAITM students during a silent protest

Sri Lanka's Free Education: A Tale of Two Realities

The Sri Lankan free education system has undoubtedly transformed countless lives. While Sri Lanka claims to offer free education to its citizens, this holds true only to a certain extent, education experts told Jaffna Monitor. Sri Lanka does provide free primary and secondary education for all, but does it truly ensure free higher education for all deserving students? Unfortunately, the answer is a resounding no.

Thousands of students sit for the G.C.E. Advanced Level (A/L) examination each year, nurturing dreams of entering the country's state university system. Yet, the harsh reality is that only a tiny fraction of these hopefuls succeed, leaving the majority in despair and uncertainty about their future.

Consider the statistics: In 2023, 173,444 students passed the A/L examination, qualifying them to pursue higher education at state universities. However, only 42,000 students—a mere 24.2%—were admitted. This left a staggering 131,444 students, or 75.8% of those eligible, without a place in state universities. The numbers were equally disheartening in 2022. Out of 171,497 students who passed the A/L examination, only 42,147 students secured admission, leaving 129,350 qualified candidates, or 75.4%, unable to access free higher education.

"What Are We Supposed to Do?"

Critics argue that while the country boasts of free education, the promise begins to crumble at the tertiary level. Limited infrastructure and resources mean that state-funded universities can only admit a fraction of eligible students, effectively denying the majority their right to



An anti-SAITM protest

higher education.

This unmet demand forces thousands of students each year to seek alternatives abroad, spending millions of dollars to pursue their dreams. A student from Jaffna told Jaffna Monitor, "How can the system claim to be 'free' when so many of us are left to fend for ourselves?"

The Unfair Gatekeeping of Sri Lanka's Medical Education System

State medical universities have limited seats, and the competition is cutthroat. Every year, countless capable students miss out—not because they lack talent or drive, but simply due to the overwhelming number of candidates vying for a spot. "Does this mean these students are unfit to study medicine? Of course not!" said an educationist in a thought-provoking conversation with Jaffna Monitor.

Exams like the A/L are designed to test knowledge under specific, high-pressure conditions. What they fail to measure are the qualities that truly define a great doctor:

empathy, dedication, resilience, and an unwavering passion to serve others. "An average performance in one exam does not determine a student's capacity to excel in medicine," the educationist emphasized. "Being a successful doctor is about far more than academic brilliance—it's about perseverance, adaptability, and a commitment to the well-being of humanity."

The educationist stressed that if a student possesses these qualities, failing to secure admission to a state university should not disqualify them from their dream of becoming a doctor. "The world constantly needs more compassionate and qualified medical professionals. Discouraging someone based on a single exam score not only crushes their potential but also robs society of their future contributions."

Another educationalist, in a conversation with Jaffna Monitor, highlighted a pressing issue with Sri Lanka's university admission system. "Let me start with a caution—I am not against the existing district quota system. It has its merits," he began. "But there are glaring

inequalities within the system that cannot be ignored."

He explained, "Take the Colombo District, for instance. Even students who score 3As and achieve higher Z-scores in their A/Ls sometimes fail to secure a medical seat because of the intense competition. Meanwhile, in certain districts, students with 2CS and significantly lower Z-scores are admitted to medical school through the quota system. How can we justify a system that denies exceptional students the chance to pursue their dreams purely because of where they come from?"

The educationalist's frustration was evident as he continued, "To make matters worse, these high-performing students are not just denied the right to study medicine in state universities—they're also blocked from pursuing it in private institutions within Sri Lanka. Is this justified? How can we defend a system that essentially shuts the door on their future?"

He shared real-life examples to underscore the problem. "I personally know students who scored 2As and a B—brilliant, hardworking young people—yet they were left out of medicine. Despite their capability and determination, the system failed them. If someone with such outstanding results is told they can't study medicine at all because of this quota system, it's not just unfair—it's a crime."

I was born in the 'wrong' district

Dr. Dilan (name changed), now a practicing medical doctor, is an alumnus of a prestigious state school in the Colombo District. Despite scoring 2As and a B, with a strong Z-score, he was unable to secure a medical seat through the district quota system. "Becoming a doctor was my only dream since I can remember," he

shared. Determined not to give up, he enrolled in SAITM to pursue his ambition.

However, his journey was far from smooth. "There was widespread opposition and systematic mudslinging against us," he recalled. One incident remains etched in his memory. "One day, my friend and I came across a photo of local medical students protesting against SAITM. They were holding placards, and one read: . 'බොරු උපාධි ගන්නා භාරා' ('fake degree buyers'). I was heartbroken and irritated at the same time."

Driven by frustration, he elaborated, "I decided to look into the backgrounds of some of the protesters. Ironically, the two medical students holding that placard had far lower results and Z-scores than mine in the same A/L exam. The only difference? I was born in the 'wrong' district, and they were born in the 'right' district."

The Crisis of Medical Education in Sri Lanka

Currently, admission criteria for non-state medical schools in Sri Lanka are strictly regulated under Gazette Extraordinary No. 2055/54, dated January 26, 2018, as outlined in the Medical (Maintenance of Minimum Standards of Medical Education) Regulations No. 01 of 2018, which were subsequently amended and published in Gazette No. 2155/15, dated December 26, 2019. These regulations were initially approved by Parliament on November 3, 2020, under Section 72 of the Medical Ordinance (Chapter 105).

However, while the draft regulations and amendments were in place, they became legally binding only after being certified by the Medical Ordinance (MPS) and published in Gazette No. 2222/69 on April 10, 2021. This



SAITM students at a silent protest



certification marked the official enforcement of the regulations.

According to these regulations, the minimum academic requirement for admission to state and non-state medical schools is two Credits and one Simple Pass in the Advanced Level (A/L) Examination, conducted by the Department of Examinations of the Ministry of Education, achieved in one and the same sitting.

Prior to the implementation of these regulations, there were no specific admission criteria for non-state medical schools. Any student who passed the A/L examination in the biology stream was eligible to pursue medical studies. Interestingly, some of Jaffna's most respected doctors, hailing from underprivileged districts like Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu, began their journeys with just three Simple Passes in the A/Ls.

Limited Seats, Unlimited Demand

In recent years, Sri Lanka has made notable strides in expanding access to medical education. Between 2015 and 2023, four new medical faculties were established in Wayamba, Sabaragamuwa, Uva Wellassa, and Moratuwa. Educationalists suggest that this expansion reflects the state's acknowledgment of the growing demand for medical education.

However, despite these efforts, a significant number of students who meet the University Grants Commission (UGC) criteria for pursuing medicine still find themselves excluded from state medical schools.

The numbers paint a sobering picture. By the academic year 2023/2024, even with the addition of four new medical faculties, progress remained marginal. Out of 27,586 students who qualified for medical education, only 2,059—a mere 7.46%—secured a spot in state-sponsored medical faculties. This staggering statistic reveals that nearly 92% of eligible students were left without access to state medical education.

Experts warn that Sri Lanka's state medical schools have already reached their breaking point. Any attempt to increase student intake without careful planning and substantial investment in resources would inevitably compromise the high standards upheld by the Sri Lanka Medical Council (SLMC). "Expanding capacity under the current conditions," they argue, "is not just challenging—it's simply unrealistic."

The economic crisis gripping Sri Lanka further compounds this issue, making the establishment of additional state medical faculties an even more distant dream. As one educationalist aptly remarked, "We cannot afford to dilute the quality of medical

education by stretching our already limited resources beyond their capacity."

The Medical Education Conundrum

While private universities and degree programs in other fields have gradually emerged to meet the growing demand—albeit inadequately—medicine remains a notable exception in Sri Lanka. For students aspiring to become doctors, the only realistic options are to pursue studies abroad or abandon their dream altogether and settle for alternative careers, as every effort to establish private medical universities within the country has met with fierce resistance.

Opposition to Private Medical Education

The strongest resistance to private medical universities comes from trade unions, most notably from the notorious Government Medical Officers' Association (GMOA), along with the All Ceylon Medical Officers Association (ACMOA), Federation of University Teachers' Associations (FUTA), and the Faculty of Medicine Teachers' Association (FMTA). Student bodies such as the Inter-University Students Federation (IUSF) and various medical student unions also play a significant role.

Ironically, these students, who benefit from taxpayer-funded education, vehemently oppose those who choose to self-fund their studies. These groups don't merely object to private medical institutions—they actively engage in protests, smear campaigns, character assassination, and fear-mongering to derail any efforts to establish such universities. Alarming, they succeed every single time.

From the North Colombo Medical College (NCMC)—independent Sri Lanka's first privately funded medical school in the 1980s—

and the Moolai Medical College established in 1985, to the more recent South Asian Institute of Technology and Medicine (SAITM), all have faced relentless opposition and were eventually shut down. The playbook has remained unchanged, and the outcome has predictably always favored the opposition.

The strategy? Saturate university students with misinformation, fueling fears that their free education is under threat. Systematically demonize private medical institutions by branding them as "fake degree factories" and portraying their students as mere buyers of worthless qualifications—unfit, incapable, and undeserving.

They don't stop there. Using orchestrated propaganda, they rally state university students to create a hostile public narrative, shaming and ostracizing private university students. The relentless pressure—amplified by this web of misinformation—forces the government to cave into their baseless demands, inevitably leading to the closure of these institutions.

The hypocrisy in their stance is glaring. They have no objection to Sri Lankan students going abroad to study medicine. Each year, a substantial number of students leave for countries like India, Bangladesh, China, Belarus, Russia, and many others to pursue medical degrees. These students collectively take millions of dollars in foreign exchange, boosting the economies of these nations while simultaneously depleting Sri Lanka's own foreign reserves.

After completing their degrees, these students return to Sri Lanka and sit for the Examination for Registration to Practice Medicine (ERPM). A significant majority pass the exam and go on to serve as doctors within Sri Lanka's healthcare system. Critics argue that if students studying medicine abroad can return, pass the ERPM, and practice in Sri Lanka, why

not allow private medical universities locally with a similar qualifying exam?

The Double Standards

Advocates for private medical colleges (PMCs) highlight the glaring contradiction in the stance of these unions and student groups. Likening this mindset to a feudal mentality.

"In the past, education was restricted to certain castes, and any attempt to educate lower castes was fiercely resisted out of fear that education would empower them and disrupt the existing hierarchy. Similarly, local medical students and unions seem to fear losing their monopoly over the medical profession and the associated social status. They are also well aware that private medical students may outperform them, which adds to their insecurity. As a result, they resort to character assassination and systematic vilification," the advocate elaborated. "They know that the establishment of private universities would mark the end of their hegemony," the advocate concluded in an interview with Jaffna Monitor.

Doctors for Free Education, But Not for My Sons!

Sources told Jaffna Monitor that one of the most vocal critics and leading opponents of private medical colleges (PMCs)—and the self-proclaimed commander-in-chief of anti-PMC protests in Sri Lanka, as well as a master of mudslinging against SAIMT—is a well-known professor and head of a department at the Colombo Medical Faculty. He spearheaded relentless campaigns against SAIMT, even going so far as to publicly declare that Sri Lanka has no need for private medical colleges. He has also claimed that the country already has enough doctors and does not require more.



From writing numerous articles and research papers (undeniably one-sided) to organizing conferences and founding the forum Doctors for Free Education to oppose PMCs, he left no stone unturned in his crusade. His advocacy made him the face of the anti-PMC movement in Sri Lanka.

But here's where the irony lies—and it's as sharp as it gets. While he vehemently opposed private medical colleges in Sri Lanka, he sent his own two sons abroad for medical education after they failed to qualify for state medical universities. This hypocrisy, a critic remarked, is the perfect example of the Tamil proverb: "தனக்கு தனக்கு என்றால் சுளகு, படக்கு படக்கு என்று அடிக்கும்". Though it cannot be translated directly, it roughly means, "If it's for oneself, it's a gentle breeze; for others, it's a punishing storm."

Critics argue that while he denies other parents the opportunity to provide their children with quality medical education in Sri Lanka, he ensures his own children receive medical training abroad. These actions, they contend, expose a glaring contradiction between his words and deeds, highlighting

the hypocritical nature of such big shots who vehemently oppose private medical colleges (PMCs).

From Targets of Protest to Titans of Medicine: The NCMC Legacy

A classic example of private medical education not being inferior to state medical education is North Colombo Medical College (NCMC). Established in 1980, the college quickly became a lightning rod for controversy, facing relentless protests and systematic mudslinging.

Speaking to Jaffna Monitor, an alumnus of NCMC, now an eminent professor abroad who wished to remain anonymous, recounted their experiences. "Just as SAIM students were labeled 'fake degree buyers,' we too were subjected to similar slurs. Our college was vilified and used as a scapegoat for every protest movement. The JVP even bombed our campus in 1988, and the Premadasa government subsequently nationalized the institution. The scale of character assassination we endured was unprecedented—Sri Lanka had never witnessed anything like it."

Despite such adversity, NCMC alumni have risen above the challenges to prove their mettle. "Of the 800 students who graduated from NCMC, more than 50% are now highly respected physicians, consultants, professors, and even vice-chancellors, making their mark globally.

"If you look at Sri Lanka's medical universities and hospitals, you'll find our alumni occupying prominent roles across the country," the professor shared. Some notable alumni include:

Professor Chandanie Wanigatunge: A Professor of Pharmacology at the Faculty of Medical Sciences, University of Sri Jayewardenepura, Sri Lanka.

Professor Udaya Ranawaka: Consultant Neurologist at Ragama Hospital.

Professor Panduka Karunanayake: Specialist in General Medicine at the Colombo Medical Faculty.

Professor Srinath Chandrasekara: A distinguished academic and contributor to medical education.

Selvanayagam Niranjan: Senior Consultant Cardiologist.

Dr. Mohan Rajakaruna: Senior Resident Cardiologist at Nawaloka Hospitals PLC in Colombo, Sri Lanka, and a Non-Executive Non-Independent Director on the Board of Nawaloka Hospital PLC.

Dr. Iresha Menike Jayatilake Banda: Clinical Oncologist practicing at Lanka Hospitals in Colombo 5, Sri Lanka.

Dr. Bimsara Senanayake: Consultant Physician and Senior Lecturer in Medicine at the University of Colombo.

Prof. Arjuna de Silva: Senior Professor in Medicine at the University of Kelaniya and Consultant Gastroenterologist, instrumental in developing sports medicine in Sri Lanka.

Dr. Nishan Amerasinghe: Consultant Neurologist associated with leading hospitals in Colombo.

Dr. Ranjani Seneviratne: Consultant Obstetrician and Gynecologist specializing in women's health.

Dr. Amita Fernando: Consultant Chest Specialist.

Dr. Maithri Chandraratne: Consultant



Dermatologist providing care for various skin conditions.

Dr. Kishan de Silva: Consultant Rheumatologist specializing in rheumatic diseases.

Prof. H. Asita de Silva: Professor of Pharmacology at the University of Kelaniya, known for his notable research contributions.

"Our graduates are living proof that private medical education can produce professionals of the highest caliber and dispel the misconception that private medical students are merely degree buyers," the professor concluded.

The Culture of Deification Among Sri Lankan Medical Students

Local Medical students and doctors in Sri Lanka are not merely students or professionals," said Perniparaja Navarathnam, a long-time advocate of private medical colleges (PMCs) in Sri Lanka. "They are treated as demigods," he explained to Jaffna Monitor. "In a city like Jaffna, if you're a medical student, it's as though you've achieved everything in life. A student, just 19 years old, securing admission to a medical program is showered with immense respect and adulation, almost on par with that of a celebrity," he

argued.

Navarathnam raised a thought-provoking question about societal attitudes: "How can a 19-year-old, showered with accolades and unquestioning admiration, be expected to grow meaningfully or evolve in life? This culture of deification stifles both individual development and the broader progress of the profession."

He elaborated further: "One who has enjoyed such adulation and privilege from a young age is naturally resistant to changes that might challenge the status quo. This is precisely why there is such strong opposition to private sector involvement in medical education—they fear it will weaken their exclusive hold over the profession. But let me clarify," he added, "I don't paint every doctor or medical student with this brush. Unfortunately, though, I can confidently say that a majority hold this view."

A Nation's Well-Being: It Takes More Than Just Doctors

"This misplaced belief that the medical profession towers above all others has deeply entrenched itself in our society," remarked an expert. "Perhaps it's the visible and immediate impact doctors have on physical health that



fuels this myth. But let's be clear—this notion is far from the truth."

Another expert offered a provocative counterpoint. "A friend of mine, a brilliant civil engineer, "once remarked—though not widely accepted—that engineers likely save or impact the health of populations far more significantly than doctors. Think about it: clean water systems, safe infrastructure, disaster preparedness... these have a profound impact on public health." They continued, "And let's not overlook the critical role of mental health. Addressing the nation's psychological well-being might require an army of counselors and therapists, not just medical doctors."

Echoing these sentiments, Dr. Ruwan Weerasinghe, in one of his incisive articles,

dismantled the idea that any single profession holds a monopoly on societal importance. He illuminated the often-overlooked yet vital contributions of lawyers, financiers, administrators, and educators. He went further, emphasizing the indispensable roles of philosophers, scientists, psychologists, sociologists, and even politicians—all intricately involved in shaping the long-term well-being of a nation.

Another advocate of private medical colleges (PMC) told Jaffna Monitor that doctors with foreign training and broader exposure often become proponents of private education. However, for obvious reasons, they can't openly voice their support. "In private discussions, many admit they've come to appreciate the value of diverse educational systems. But for others, the mindset remains

unchanged," he explained.

A classic example lies in figures like Prof. Carlo Fonseka, Prof. Nalin de Silva, and Dr. Rajitha Senaratne. They were vocal critics of the North Colombo Medical College (NCMC) and prominent speakers at public rallies organized against it. Yet, over two decades later, their views shifted dramatically. Today, they openly support the establishment of private medical colleges.

Prof. Carlo Fonseka even remarked that NCMC serves as a solid example of how the private sector can produce high-quality medical practitioners. "But," Navarathnam added with a wry smile, "not everyone gets enlightened."

Limited Availability of Biology Stream in State Schools

An educationalist told Jaffna Monitor that many students face an uphill battle just to gain admission to the Biology stream for Advanced Level (A/L) studies, a crucial step for pursuing medical education. The reason? Limited access. According to the Ministry of Education's 2021 School Census, out of 10,146 state schools in Sri Lanka, only 1,011 schools (classified as 1AB) offer the Biology stream. This glaring gap leaves countless aspiring medical students unable to even meet the basic qualifications set by the UGC and SLMC, dashing their dreams before they can even begin.

International School Students: Stranded by the System?

Sri Lanka's education system is a fascinating paradox, an expert told Jaffna Monitor. While traditional schools face numerous challenges, a new type of institution has emerged: international schools. Once catering to a niche market, these schools have now become a

significant part of the country's educational landscape.

However, this growth is overshadowed by stark inequalities. Rural schools continue to grapple with inadequate resources and teacher shortages, while urban areas experience a surge in demand for international education. This demand is driven by aspirations for global competitiveness but remains largely accessible only to the affluent.

Despite these disparities, international schools are flourishing. As of July 2023, an impressive 421 such schools were registered in Sri Lanka, with nearly a quarter of a million students enrolled. These institutions equip students with globally recognized qualifications, yet these very credentials often become a barrier to accessing local universities.

Consider this: Sri Lanka invests in cultivating a generation of globally-minded students, only to deny them entry into its state universities. Admission to these universities is based solely on local examinations, forcing international school graduates to choose between pursuing higher education abroad or seeking the limited options offered by private institutions—if available.

This disconnect has led to a worrying "brain drain," experts told Jaffna Monitor. Sri Lanka risks losing its brightest minds to other countries simply because its education system is not designed to accommodate the talent it produces.

"It's a perplexing situation," an expert remarked. "If Sri Lanka wants to retain its homegrown talent and truly capitalize on the international school boom, this puzzle must be solved. Otherwise, what's the point of having these institutions?"

An anti-Private Medical College (PMC)

activist told Jaffna Monitor, "If these so-called 'rich' students can afford international schools, why can't they pay for private higher education?" Critics, however, were quick to counter with a heartfelt argument: "First of all, not all international school students are 'rich kids.' Many come from humble backgrounds, with hardworking parents who sacrifice everything to give their children a better future. What's so wrong with wanting your child to have an international-standard education in English?"

One critic shared a moving story: "An auto driver I know enrolled his only daughter in a prestigious international school. He once told me, 'I'll do whatever it takes—work 24 hours a day if I must—so my daughter can have the education I never had.' These are not the 'privileged elite' people imagine—they are parents who dream big for their children."

He then posed a compelling question: "If a top-performing Biology student from an international school excels in their London A-Levels, why can't they pursue medicine locally, even with self-funding? And why is it such a problem to let private medical colleges operate in Sri Lanka? Are we really crying over international schools while denying these students the chance to achieve their dreams?"

For instance, a student excelling in the London A-Levels can pursue medicine almost anywhere in the world – except in Sri Lanka, where private medical colleges are non-existent. This policy anomaly not only restricts individual aspirations but also potentially deprives the nation of valuable human capital.

An advocate for PMCs called this policy "utter foolishness or arrogance," adding, "Allowing international curricula for primary and secondary education without a pathway for tertiary education is a blatant oversight. This forces a massive outflow of foreign

exchange, which could otherwise strengthen Sri Lanka's education system." The advocate emphasized, "If you permit international curricula for school education, why not for higher education? Without this, the system is fundamentally flawed."



Dr. Hassan Hussain

Hassan Hussain: A Case in Point

Hassan Hussain, a Lyceum International School alumnus, soared to new heights in 2010, securing four A grades in his Cambridge A-Levels, including As in Physics and Chemistry. This stellar achievement, coupled with his prowess in Biology and Mathematics, catapulted him into the spotlight as the batch topper. His academic brilliance unlocked doors to prestigious universities like Cambridge, Oxford, Stanford, and Harvard, where he could pursue his passion for medicine or engineering with generous scholarships.

Despite these international opportunities, Hussain opted to remain in Sri Lanka and pursue his medical education at SAITM (South Asian Institute of Technology and



A protest against SAIMT.

Medicine). At the time, SAIMT was a newly established private medical college and the sole option for students seeking to study medicine domestically. 'I stayed because my parents wished for me to remain close to home,' Hussain explained, 'but this decision came with significant challenges.'

"Despite his remarkable academic achievements and undeniable talent, Hussain faced a wave of criticism and doubt. 'We were accused of buying our degrees,' he shared, the sting of those accusations still palpable in his voice. 'It was so painful to hear those words,' he confessed. Today, Hussain serves as a Registrar in General Medicine at Sri Jayewardenepura Hospital, and he is awaiting his final exams to become a fully qualified specialist.

If There's a Start, There Must Be a Way Forward

"Sri Lanka has sown the seeds of international education, but it has failed to nurture the

harvest. These bright young minds, cultivated in the fertile soil of international schools, are left to wither without a clear pathway to higher education," he lamented. "The lack of a structured pathway for tertiary education is a grave injustice." "If there's a start, there must be a way forward—otherwise, there shouldn't be a start at all," he told Jaffna Monitor.

Brain Drain and Dollar Drain

An economic expert shared a fascinating yet alarming insight during a conversation with Jaffna Monitor: "Did you know that approximately 25% of Sri Lanka's spending on imports goes toward fuel? This significant portion is understandable, given the country's lack of domestic fuel resources. While fuel imports are expected, the next major expense might surprise you: milk powder. Sri Lanka spends around \$300 million annually on importing this dietary staple.

But perhaps the most shocking revelation

is the third biggest expense: education. The country is hemorrhaging foreign exchange to fund overseas education for its students," he explained. "The money spent on education abroad actually exceeds Sri Lanka's entire national education budget," he emphasized.

Despite this troubling trend, no government has taken concrete steps to address it. "Not one administration has made any serious effort to stop this drain of funds," he lamented. While the government struggles to allocate sufficient resources to schools and universities, families are spending billions to send their children abroad for education. "This is making a mockery of our education system," he remarked.

Transnational Education: A Slap on the Face of Sri Lanka's Higher Education System

Transnational Education (TNE) programs offer students the opportunity to earn internationally recognized qualifications without leaving their home country. Delivered through partnerships between local and foreign universities, these programs promise global standards paired with local accessibility. However, for Sri Lanka, the rising popularity of TNE programs is a damning reflection of the country's short-sighted higher education policies, an educationalist told Jaffna Monitor. "It's a glaring reminder of how the system has failed to evolve and meet the needs of its students," she added.

A Nation Leaning on TNE

Sri Lanka has become a key player in the global TNE landscape, driven largely by the inadequacies of its local higher education system. Recent data from the British Council Sri Lanka (August 2024) reveals that Sri Lanka

ranks second globally—just behind China—in sending students to the United Kingdom for TNE programs. During the academic year 2022–2023 alone, 53,915 Sri Lankan students were enrolled in UK TNE programs. Over a five-year period from 2018 to 2023, enrolments increased by 50%, with an average annual growth rate of 17% since 2020.

An economist speaking to Jaffna Monitor highlighted the striking comparison: "Sri Lanka's population is just a fraction of China's, yet it ranks second only to China and accounts for a staggering 10% of all global TNE enrolments in the UK." This reveals not only the high demand for higher education but also the lack of accessible options within Sri Lanka.

Why TNE Is Booming

The growth of TNE can be attributed to the significant challenges Sri Lankan students face in pursuing higher education locally. With limited seats, fierce competition, and a lack of diversity in available programs, many students are compelled to look abroad—or toward TNE programs—for opportunities. For families, these programs offer hope: a chance for their children to access world-class education without the upheaval of moving abroad.

At What Cost?

However, this hope comes with a hefty price tag. As one economist pointed out, TNE programs are draining millions of dollars from Sri Lanka's economy. Families are pouring significant amounts of foreign currency into these programs to secure a better future for their children—funds that could otherwise be invested in improving the country's own higher education system.

The High Cost of Foreign Medical Education: A Wake-Up Call for Sri Lanka

An advocate for private medical colleges (PMCs) revealed to Jaffna Monitor some eye-opening statistics about Sri Lanka's reliance on foreign medical education. "The Sri Lanka Medical Council (SLMC) conducts the ERPM Examination twice a year, with approximately 500–700 students sitting for the exam in each session. This means at least 1,200 Sri Lankan students annually complete foreign medical degrees and return home," they explained.

Breaking down the numbers, they elaborated: "The average course fee for a medical degree abroad starts at a minimum of LKR 15 million per student. And that's just the tuition. It doesn't include additional costs for accommodation, food, travel, and other expenses incurred over the typical five-year duration of a medical program. Parents often make repeated visits, further driving up costs."

To put this into perspective, an economist told Jaffna Monitor that over the past five years, Sri Lanka has lost no less than USD 250 million solely on tuition fees for foreign medical degrees. "When you factor in other expenses like accommodation, travel, and living costs, the total outflow is staggering," they added.

This massive drain of foreign exchange, they argued, underscores a serious economic challenge for the country. "It's not just about individual families bearing these costs—it's about a nation losing critical resources that could have been invested in strengthening our local education system, particularly medical education."

This trend not only reflects the challenges facing Sri Lanka's economy but also fuels the country's growing brain drain—a phenomenon where skilled individuals leave their home country in pursuit of better opportunities abroad. For Sri Lanka, this is particularly evident in the field of medicine,

with thousands of students seeking education overseas. UNESCO reported 29,000 Sri Lankan enrollments in foreign universities in 2020, a number expected to exceed 32,000 by 2027.

The financial toll is staggering. Tuition fees and living expenses for these students collectively cost the country an estimated \$1 billion annually, according to ICEF Monitor. But the impact goes far beyond economics. This exodus disrupts family and social structures and hampers the nation's ability to foster innovation and development, as many students choose not to return, opting instead to build their futures abroad.

High-Value Loans: A Pathway to Medical Education

One of the most serious allegations often leveled against private medical students is the perception that they are "rich kids" and that establishing private medical universities in Sri Lanka would make medical education unaffordable for the majority. However, economists suggest a viable solution to address this concern.

Speaking to Jaffna Monitor, experts propose that with proper regulations and oversight, banks in Sri Lanka could offer high-value, long-term loans to aspiring medical students. These loans would be based on the strong financial prospects associated with obtaining a globally recognized medical degree. Once students complete their education and secure full registration, they are almost guaranteed employment opportunities, either in Sri Lanka or abroad. This enables them to repay the loans over time without undue financial burden.

"This model," an economist pointed out, "has already been successfully implemented in countries like the UK, ensuring that financial

constraints do not prevent deserving students from pursuing their dreams of becoming doctors."

They further explained, "If Sri Lanka adopts a similar approach, it could revolutionize access to medical education, breaking down barriers and providing opportunities for students from all social and economic backgrounds to achieve their ambitions."

Such a shift, they argued, could not only address the shortage of local medical education opportunities but also create a more inclusive system that empowers the next generation of Sri Lankan doctors.

Sri Lanka's Prescription for Economic Growth: Private Medical Colleges

One of Sri Lanka's potential remedies for its economic challenges could lie in the establishment of private medical colleges (PMCs)," an economist told Jaffna Monitor. Reflecting on the recent economic meltdown, the economist argued that the government should seriously consider PMCs as a transformative solution to the crisis.

"Given the international acclaim Sri Lanka's education system enjoys, the introduction of PMCs would undoubtedly attract foreign students, including a significant number from the extensive Tamil diaspora," they stated. "This initiative could generate substantial revenue, inject much-needed vitality into the local economy, and elevate our country to a higher level of development," they emphasized.

Regional Trends in Foreign Medical Education

They point out, for instance, that neighboring countries like India, Bangladesh, Malaysia, and even European nations such as Belarus have

successfully attracted significant numbers of foreign students to their medical programs, thereby boosting their economies. Anecdotal evidence suggests that private medical schools in India cater to a substantial number of international students. Similarly, Malaysia has positioned itself as a premier destination for medical education.

Experts say a remarkable example Sri Lanka could consider emulating is Bangladesh. Government medical colleges in Bangladesh reserve 200 seats specifically for foreign candidates, while private medical colleges allocate 45% of their seats to international students. This policy, coupled with the fact that medical education is conducted in English, has enabled Bangladesh to accommodate approximately 5,000 foreign students, primarily from India, pursuing medical studies in the country. Experts estimate that these students contribute an average of USD 20,000 per year in fees, generating a substantial USD 100 million annually for the Bangladeshi economy.

In a conversation with Jaffna Monitor, economists highlighted that "Sri Lanka enjoys a far better reputation in education than Bangladesh. If a country like Bangladesh can attract 5,000 foreign students annually, Sri Lanka could draw even more with its potential for well-structured and efficiently managed private medical colleges (PMCs)."

They emphasized that if PMCs were to be established in Sri Lanka, the natural medium of instruction would be English. "Currently, many students choose countries like China and Russia for medical studies, where they are required to learn the local language. By offering medical education in English, Sri Lanka could position itself as a highly attractive destination for international students. This, in turn, would generate a substantial economic boost for the country."



Mocking effigies of SAIMT founder Dr. Neville Fernando and politicians displayed during an anti-SAIMT protest

Economists argue that Sri Lanka could generate significant revenue even if medical schools initially set tuition fees lower than those of competing countries, from USD 12,000 to USD 20,000 per year. For instance, with an annual intake of 500 foreign students and an average tuition fee of USD 15,000, the country could still earn approximately USD 7.5 million annually from tuition fees alone in the initial stages.

They further elaborated that tuition fees are just one aspect of the economic potential. These students would also spend on accommodation, food, transportation, and other living expenses, injecting additional income into the local economy. Moreover, the areas surrounding the PMCs could thrive, transforming into modern urban centers, as seen in other nations that have successfully adopted this model.

Sri Lanka's Unique Appeal for Medical Education

In a conversation with Jaffna Monitor, economists highlighted several factors that could make Sri Lanka an attractive destination

for foreign students pursuing medical education. The country's rich cultural heritage, stunning natural beauty, and warm, hospitable environment are major draws. Iconic attractions such as Sri Lanka's renowned tea plantations, ancient cities, and diverse wildlife add to its appeal. Furthermore, the relatively low cost of living compared to Western countries makes Sri Lanka a financially attractive option for international students.

From Ghost Towns to Thriving Hubs: The Power of Educational Institutions

"Education has the power to transform not just the student but the very fabric of a community," an economist declared to the Jaffna Monitor. "Look at College Station, Texas! Before Texas A&M University arrived in 1876, it was practically a ghost town. Now, it's a bustling city of over 120,000, with a diverse economy fueled by the university."

He continued, "But we don't need to look to the USA for inspiration. Manipal, India, was once a sleepy village. Then came the Manipal Academy of Higher Education, and boom! It



became a vibrant hub synonymous with top-notch education and a buzzing student life. Infrastructure blossomed, businesses thrived, and the quality of life soared."

Another economist chimed in, "Why look so far? We have our own Malabe! Once a quiet suburb of Colombo, it's now a sought-after area, thanks to institutions like SAIMT, SLIIT, CINEC, and Horizon Campus. Housing, businesses, and infrastructure exploded. Property values skyrocketed!"

The economists were practically bursting with optimism! They painted a vivid picture of Sri Lanka's future, where world-class PMCs wouldn't just educate doctors and act as powerful magnets for progress. These institutions, they argued, would breathe new life into their surrounding communities, sparking economic growth and development and propelling these areas to new heights.

The Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora, estimated at approximately 887,000 globally, represents a significant opportunity for private medical

colleges (PMCs) in Sri Lanka. Concentrated in countries such as Canada and the United Kingdom, this diaspora has achieved considerable financial success and maintains a strong desire to contribute to the development of their homeland. Experts suggest that this could create substantial demand for medical education in Sri Lanka, particularly in Tamil-speaking regions.

If PMCs are allowed to establish themselves in these areas, they could offer a compelling alternative for the younger generation of the diaspora to pursue medical studies closer to their cultural roots. Not only would this be a cost-effective option compared to Western institutions, but it would also provide an opportunity to reconnect with their heritage. For example, a 5-year medical program in the West typically costs between USD 400,000 and USD 550,000. In contrast, a comparable program in Sri Lanka could be offered at less than half that cost—or even lower—making it an attractive choice, an economist told Jaffna Monitor.

A Sri Lankan-born Canadian businessman, in a conversation with the Jaffna Monitor, shared his vision of contributing to his Native place, Mullaitivu. "Imagine," he enthused, "a thriving medical college in Mullaitivu, a district still recovering from the scars of war. It would be transformative! Not just for the students, but for the entire region."



He spoke with heartfelt passion. "My son studied medicine in Canada," he explained, "but wouldn't it be incredible if my grandson could pursue his medical dreams right here, close to his roots, in a world-class institution? If permitted, these PMCs could be the seed that blossoms into a whole education hub, attracting talent and investment from around the globe, and ultimately making Sri Lanka a global economic and education powerhouse."

Ensuring Quality in Private Medical Education: A Roadmap for Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka's healthcare system is in a state of crisis, exacerbated by an alarming exodus of medical professionals. Over 2,000 doctors—representing 10% of the country's medical workforce—have left the country since early 2022, driven by the economic downturn and a lack of opportunities. According to Ministry of Defence data, 477 doctors and 125 consultants migrated abroad in 2023 alone, with only one doctor returning for every four who leave. This exodus includes not only general medical officers but also specialized consultants, surgeons, and anesthesiologists, leaving critical gaps in the healthcare system. Many doctors on long-term foreign leave have no intention of returning, while others depart without notifying the Ministry of Health.

The impact of this talent drain is felt most acutely in rural hospitals, where resources were already stretched thin. Medical insiders revealed to Jaffna Monitor that some facilities now operate with as few as three doctors, tasked with caring for populations exceeding 75,000. These shortages have pushed rural hospitals to the brink of collapse, leaving underserved communities vulnerable to rising mortality rates and a sharp decline in overall health outcomes.

Compounding the issue is the scarcity of essential medications and limited capacity for vital laboratory tests, further eroding the quality of care. "The situation is dire," an expert told Jaffna Monitor, highlighting the urgent need for sustainable interventions to stabilize the system.

While Sri Lanka boasts 1.19 doctors per 1,000 people, according to 2021 World Bank data—higher than regional peers like India (0.7) and Bangladesh (0.7)—it still lags behind nations such as Malaysia (2.2) and Australia (4.1). On paper, these figures may seem sufficient, but they fail to account for the uneven distribution of medical personnel and the increasing demand for healthcare services.

The Ministry of Health's Annual Health Bulletin 2021 reported 102 medical officers per 100,000 people, servicing 2,352 hospitals and

1,170 registered private medical institutions. This supply is insufficient to meet the goals outlined in Sri Lanka's National Health Strategic Master Plan (2016–2025), which emphasizes expanding preventive care services and increasing the availability of skilled healthcare professionals.

Sri Lanka's Healthcare Crisis: Bold Decisions Needed

Sri Lanka's healthcare crisis demands urgent and decisive action. An expert speaking to Jaffna Monitor asserted that the time for half-measures has passed. Faced with a mass exodus of doctors and a crippled economy, the nation must confront a pivotal choice: either significantly increase the intake of state medical students or embrace the establishment of private medical institutions.

With the construction of new state universities nearly impossible under current financial constraints, the expert advocated for a pragmatic solution. "Setting aside egos and allowing private medical universities to flourish is the only viable path forward," she stated. This, she explained, is the fastest and most realistic way to address Sri Lanka's critical shortage of doctors.

However, implementing private medical colleges (PMCs) must be handled with care, warned an advocate for PMCs. "We cannot overlook concerns about quality control, ethical practices, and fears of profit-driven motives taking precedence over patient care," he told Jaffna Monitor.

The advocate stressed the need for a robust regulatory framework. "Without stringent accreditation standards and transparent oversight mechanisms, the integrity of medical education could be compromised. PMCs must uphold the highest educational and ethical standards to gain public trust and fulfill their

purpose."

Accessibility was another crucial issue he highlighted. "PMCs cannot become exclusive sanctuaries for the privileged. To truly succeed, they must create opportunities for talented students from all socioeconomic backgrounds. Affordability and inclusivity must be at the core of this initiative," he emphasized.

Ultimately, the advocate expressed optimism about the transformative potential of PMCs. "They have the power to fill critical gaps in our healthcare system, but this transformation must be equitable. PMCs should not only address the doctor shortage but also contribute to a fairer, more inclusive healthcare landscape," he concluded.

The expert also emphasized the importance of safeguards to ensure the success of private medical universities. "Rigorous monitoring and evaluation are essential to maintain high standards. This goal is entirely achievable with the right political will," she insisted.

The expert recommended a standardized examination for all private medical students to address potential opposition from organizations like the Government Medical Officers' Association (GMOA) and state medical students. This examination would be similar to the ERPM (Examination for Registration to Practice Medicine) required for foreign medical graduates.

She argued that if Sri Lankan students trained abroad can return, pass the ERPM, and practice medicine, the same standard should apply to graduates of local private medical universities. This system would ensure consistency in medical education standards and address concerns about the quality of private medical colleges, creating a more equitable environment for all aspiring doctors in Sri Lanka.

Gary Anandasangaree Breaks the Ice with Sri Lanka, But Not with His Father



After years of being unofficially barred from entering Sri Lanka, Gary Anandasangaree, Canada's Minister responsible for the Northern Economic Development Agency and a Sri Lankan Tamil of notable heritage, has finally set foot in his ancestral homeland. Gary, the son of maverick Sri Lankan Tamil politician V. Anandasangaree—an ardent critic of the LTTE and its leader, Velupillai Prabhakaran—ironically found himself often labeled as a pro-LTTE advocate. His vocal stances on

Tamil issues and human rights frequently made headlines and rendered his entry into Sri Lanka a politically charged matter.

A few months ago, former Sri Lankan Foreign Minister Ali Sabry, in an exclusive interview with Jaffna Monitor, did not mince words when discussing the Tamil diaspora's investment potential. While emphasizing that "thousands of visas are issued daily to diaspora Tamils," Sabry remarked pointedly, "The only visa we declined was that of Canada's Minister



Gary Anandasangaree with ITAK parliamentarians in Colombo

Gary Anandasangaree. We did not want to be a tool in his political play. That's why we rejected it."

However, with the National People's Power (NPP) government now at the helm, Gary's visa was finally approved, paving the way for his long-anticipated visit to Sri Lanka.

During his visit, Gary met with parliamentarians from the Ilankai Tamil Arasu Katchi (ITAK) in Colombo. The meeting, held in Bambalapitiya, was attended by ITAK MPs Thurairasa Ravikaran, Padmanathan Sathiyalingam, Shanmugam Kugathanan, Gnanamuthu Srinesan, and Ilayathambi Srinath.

However, prominent ITAK leaders, including MPs Sritharan, Shanakiyan Rasamanickam, and the party's legal luminary M.A. Sumanthiran, were notably absent, as they

were in Tamil Nadu attending the Tamil Nadu government's Ayalaga Tamilar Dhinam (Day of the Global Tamil Diaspora). Whether their absence was due to scheduling conflicts or a deliberate choice to distance themselves from Gary at the Bambalapitiya meeting remains a matter of speculation.

While Gary's visit marked an important political milestone, it also brought attention to his estranged relationship with his father, V. Anandasangaree. Gary's mother, Yogam, separated from Anandasangaree in the 1980s, and the father and son have reportedly met only twice since—most recently in 1983.

Although sources hint that V. Anandasangaree was in Kilinochchi during Gary's visit, a father-son reunion was clearly not on the itinerary. The two managed to stay as far apart emotionally as they did geographically.

Farmers Must Be Protected from Middlemen: Northern Province Governor

Northern Province Governor N. Vethanayagan emphasized the need to protect farmers from exploitation by middlemen and to ensure fair market prices for their produce. He also announced plans to reopen economic centers in the province this year to address these critical issues.

The Governor made these remarks during the paddy harvesting festival and farmer recognition ceremony organized by the Maravanpulavu Farmers' Association. The event was held at the Maravanpulavu Sakalakalavalli School on Monday morning.

In his keynote address, Governor Vethanayagan highlighted the impact of climate change on agriculture: "Climate change has become a significant challenge for farmers. In the past, paddy harvesting seasons were not disrupted by rain. However, we now face erratic weather patterns that affect farming operations. Last November, despite heavy rains over a few days, we were fortunate to avoid substantial paddy losses. These rains, combined with the current weather, have left fields waterlogged, which farmers can use to their advantage."

The Governor encouraged farmers to diversify by cultivating minor millets after completing



their paddy harvests. He assured them that the Department of Agriculture, through the Chief Secretary, has initiated measures to provide seeds for these crops.

"While other districts in the Northern Province rely on irrigation for dual cropping seasons, Jaffna depends entirely on rainfall and is limited to one cropping season. By adapting to the current climatic changes, farmers can cultivate minor millets and increase their income."

He also called for a forward-thinking approach to agriculture, emphasizing the importance of aligning crop production with the region's soil suitability and export potential. The Governor assured farmers that the Department of Agriculture would support the implementation of these strategies.



From Fishing Village to Global Hub: How Shenzhen Conquered Urban Growth and Pollution

Jaffna Monitor in Shenzhen

I found myself standing amidst a forest of gleaming skyscrapers, their glass facades shimmering in the sunlight and bustling tech hubs that seemed to defy gravity. This was Shenzhen—the "Silicon Valley of China." It was hard to believe that just a few decades ago, this sprawling, futuristic metropolis had been nothing more than a sleepy fishing village with a population of merely 28,000. It felt like a story lifted straight from the pages of a science fiction novel.

Locals told me that back in the early 1980s, Shenzhen was a modest settlement, with life revolving around rickety fishing boats bobbing along the shoreline and a handful of simple homes scattered across the landscape. The population at the time was

just a few lakhs. Today, with over 20 million residents, Shenzhen boasts thousands of towering skyscrapers, architectural marvels, and awe-inspiring infrastructure. In just a few decades, it has transformed from a small fishing village into a leading global powerhouse.

This astonishing growth is reflected in Shenzhen's meteoric economic rise. The City's GDP has soared to approximately \$500 billion. To put this into perspective, Sri Lanka's projected GDP for 2024 is around \$80 billion, making Shenzhen's GDP—just that of a single city—over six times larger than Sri Lanka's entire economy.

Even more impressive is Shenzhen's ability to achieve this rapid development while tackling environmental challenges. Despite the vast scale of its infrastructure and industries, Shenzhen has emerged as one of the cleanest cities in both China and the world. How clean, you ask? Consider this: as of December 2024, Colombo's Air Quality Index (AQI) fluctuates between 96 and 106, categorized

as 'Moderate,' with some areas facing even higher pollution levels. Meanwhile, Shenzhen, with infrastructure and industrial activity far surpassing Colombo's, has maintained an AQI ranging from 24 to 64, indicating consistent 'Good' to 'Moderate' air quality.

Environmental experts, speaking to Jaffna Monitor, have highlighted Shenzhen as a shining example of a top-tier international city that consistently meets national air quality standards.

The Birth of a Global Icon: Shenzhen's Extraordinary Journey

A local told Jaffna Monitor that Shenzhen's transformation began in 1980 when it was designated as China's first-ever Special Economic Zone (SEZ). This bold initiative was a cornerstone of Deng Xiaoping's sweeping reforms. Widely regarded as the architect of modern China, Deng opened the nation's economy to the world after decades of isolation under strict communist policies.



Few, including locals who spoke to Jaffna Monitor, could have imagined the seismic changes ahead. "We never imagined our town would become a global economic powerhouse," one resident remarked. Yet, the decision to transform this unassuming village into a testing ground for free-market reforms set in motion a dramatic evolution.

Experts told Jaffna Monitor that China's economic condition before the reforms was dire, plagued by inefficiencies in its centrally planned system. In 1981, more than 88% of the population lived below the international poverty line. Industries were state-owned and technologically outdated, trade was minimal, and foreign investment was virtually nonexistent.

However, the tide began to turn with the reforms initiated under Deng Xiaoping. The announcement in May 1980 to establish the Special Economic Zone (SEZ) marked a significant departure from China's past policies. Experts noted that Shenzhen was strategically chosen due to its proximity to Hong Kong, a thriving capitalist economy at the time, and envisioned as mainland China's answer to Hong Kong.

The SEZ implemented groundbreaking measures, including tax incentives, relaxed labor laws, and reduced regulatory barriers, fostering an environment designed for economic experimentation. An economic stalwart, speaking with Jaffna Monitor, remarked, "As China's first Special Economic Zone (SEZ), Shenzhen was envisioned as a testing ground where market capitalism could thrive under the framework of 'socialism with Chinese characteristics.'"

The results were nothing short of transformative. Billions of dollars flowed into the City; Skyscrapers rose swiftly, like bamboo

shoots after rain. Shenzhen rapidly gained a reputation as China's gateway to the world. By the 1990s, its economy was thriving and rivaling the vibrancy and dynamism of the most developed cities globally.

Yet, this meteoric rise came at a steep cost.

As factories churned out goods at an unprecedented pace, the City's environment bore the brunt of industrialization. By the end of the 20th century, Shenzhen stood at a critical crossroads. Its success had come at the expense of its air, water, and land.

Birth of Shenzhen's Green Revolution

Then came what experts call Shenzhen's Green Revolution—Guided by expert advice, the city government adopted a series of ambitious, science-backed, and innovative strategies aimed at tackling pollution while maintaining its remarkable economic growth.

So, how did Shenzhen pull off this transformation?

Revolutionizing Transportation

One of the most transformative measures undertaken by Shenzhen's authorities was revolutionizing its transportation system. In a pioneering effort, Shenzhen electrified its entire public bus fleet. Building on this success, the City went a step further by electrifying over 99% of its taxi fleet.

To encourage the adoption of electric vehicles (EVs), generous subsidies were offered to buyers. As a result, EVs have become widely used in both private and public transportation. Shenzhen's infrastructure has transformed to meet the demands of EVs. The city has developed over 80,000 charging stations to



Shenzhen, China 1980 vs 2011



ensure convenient charging, while numerous companies are actively working to enhance charging speeds further.

The city has successfully fostered a collective mindset that not only embraces electric vehicles (EVs) but also seamlessly integrates them into everyday life. Remarkably, Shenzhen's residents have enthusiastically adopted EVs, showing little to no resistance to the transition.

The City of a Thousand Parks

The authorities didn't stop at revolutionizing Shenzhen's transportation system—they rejuvenated old parks and created new ones, transforming the City into a green paradise. Today, Shenzhen is aptly called "The City of a Thousand Parks," with over 1,200 parks, ranging from revitalized natural reserves like Wutong Mountain National Forest Park to newly developed, charming community spaces.

Unlike many other rapidly industrializing cities, Shenzhen integrated vast green areas

into its urban design. Adding to its progressive urban philosophy, Shenzhen is one of the few cities in the world where pets are allowed on public transportation. It's not uncommon to see pet owners riding the metro, boarding buses, or walking through shopping malls with their dogs.

Dasha River Ecological Corridor

Undoubtedly, One of Shenzhen's most remarkable environmental achievements is the regeneration of the Dasha River Ecological Corridor, a landmark project in the City's Nanshan District. Once a neglected and polluted waterway, the corridor now spans approximately 13.7 kilometers (about 8.5 miles) from the Changlingpi Reservoir to the estuary of Shenzhen Bay, covering an area of nearly 950,000 square meters.

The revitalized corridor is adorned with vibrant plants and blooming flowers along its banks. Speaking to Jaffna Monitor, an expert emphasized the innovation behind the project: "The greenery along the Dasha River is carefully chosen to be non-invasive to native





species and is specifically designed to filter pollutants from rainwater and city wastewater. This approach not only purifies the water but also creates a thriving habitat for wildlife."

Industrial Transformation: From Smoke to Silicon

Shenzhen's rise to global prominence began with its manufacturing sector. However, as factories churned out products at an unprecedented pace, they also released pollutants into the air, water, and soil. Recognizing the unsustainability of this path, experts say Shenzhen embarked on an ambitious transformation to rewrite its industrial narrative—what they describe as evolving from a "city of smoke" to a "city of silicon."

The Shift to High-Tech Industries

Understanding that pollution and long-term prosperity could not coexist, the government laid the groundwork for a revolutionary shift toward cleaner, smarter industries. Polluting factories were systematically relocated or shut down, making way for innovation-driven enterprises.

The City became a magnet for high-tech industries, attracting pioneers in electronics, biotechnology, and renewable energy. Iconic companies like Huawei, Tencent, and BYD found fertile ground in Shenzhen.

Restoring Rivers and Revitalizing Ecosystems

Water pollution was once one of Shenzhen's

gravest challenges, threatening the City's environment and public health as it expanded rapidly. However, Since 2016, the City has implemented a series of ambitious measures to combat water pollution, including the construction of nearly 4,000 miles of advanced sewage networks using cutting-edge rainwater diversion technology.

This innovative approach separates rainwater from sewage, preventing untreated wastewater from overflowing into rivers and other water bodies during heavy rains. By channeling rainwater and sewage through distinct systems, Shenzhen has significantly reduced contamination in its waterways. This massive infrastructure investment has transformed previously polluted rivers and lakes into clean, flowing waters that now sustain thriving ecosystems.

Restoring Wild Waterways

In 2019, Shenzhen achieved a historic milestone by becoming the first City in China to fully restore its wild waterways. Once clogged with waste and severely polluted, rivers such as the Maozhou River have been revitalized. The Maozhou River, previously considered one of the most polluted rivers in Guangdong Province, now boasts clear waters and flourishing biodiversity.

Shenzhen's water restoration efforts go hand in hand with its broader commitment to sustainability. The City has invested in smart water management systems, including real-time monitoring technologies, to promptly detect and address pollution sources. Furthermore, Shenzhen has created multiple wetland parks and constructed wetlands, which act as natural filters to purify water and provide habitats for wildlife.

The results of these efforts have been transformative. Over 98% of Shenzhen's waterways have now met the required water quality standards, a feat celebrated as a model for other cities in China and around the world.

A New Era of Green Architecture

Shenzhen's green building revolution is underpinned by rigorous regulations that mandate energy-efficient designs, the use of sustainable materials, and the integration of renewable energy. Buildings in Shenzhen employ advanced materials designed to minimize heat absorption while enhancing insulation, significantly reducing the need for energy-intensive cooling systems in the City's subtropical climate. Strategic architectural elements like optimized window placements, light wells, and reflective glass maximize natural light and reduce dependency on artificial lighting, cutting electricity use by up to 30% in many cases.

Proper ventilation systems ensure high indoor air quality while conserving energy. These systems often feature smart sensors that intelligently regulate air circulation and temperature.

Pioneering the Vertical Green City Revolution

Shenzhen exemplifies a modern city where towering skyscrapers are not merely feats of engineering but living, breathing ecosystems. A green vertical town incorporates greenery such as plants, trees, and gardens directly into the design of tall buildings, creating eco-friendly urban spaces that reduce pollution, enhance air quality, and improve the well-being of residents. This concept is no longer a futuristic vision in Shenzhen—it is a thriving reality. Shenzhen has emerged as a global

beacon of eco-friendly and green vertical urban development by seamlessly integrating sustainable architecture with vertical greenery.

Sponge City Program: Transforming Flood Challenges into Opportunities

Shenzhen's innovative Sponge City Program is redefining urban resilience by transforming the challenge of urban flooding—a common scenario in many cities—into an opportunity for sustainable development. The program is designed to absorb, store, and purify rainwater using a combination of green infrastructure and smart water management systems. Permeable pavements, rain gardens, bioswales, and wetlands are strategically integrated into the cityscape to naturally filter and reuse rainwater, significantly reducing surface runoff during heavy rains, experts explained to Jaffna Monitor.

The impact of the Sponge City Program has been transformative. Flood risks have decreased, water quality has improved, and the urban heat island effect has been mitigated. By capturing up to 70% of stormwater, Shenzhen ensures cleaner water for irrigation, landscaping, and various non-potable urban uses. Moreover, experts note that by enhancing groundwater recharge, the program is

contributing to long-term water security.

Solar Power at the Forefront

Solar energy is another cornerstone of Shenzhen's architectural innovation. Many of the City's high-rise buildings are outfitted with photovoltaic panels, harnessing the region's abundant sunlight to generate clean, renewable energy. Some buildings even feature integrated solar façades, turning entire surfaces into energy-generating systems. This widespread use of solar technology has significantly reduced Shenzhen's reliance on fossil fuels, contributing to a notable decrease in carbon emissions.

Urban Reforestation and Coastal Restoration

Over the years, the City has planted millions of trees, converting wastelands into lush parks and nature reserves. These efforts have helped absorb carbon emissions, reduce urban flooding, and improve air quality.

One of the City's standout projects is the restoration of its mangrove forests along the coastline. These ecosystems act as natural flood barriers, protect biodiversity, and sequester carbon.





Tackling Waste Management

Shenzhen's population explosion created mountains of waste. To address this, the City invested in advanced waste-to-energy (WTE) plants capable of generating clean energy from municipal solid waste. These facilities have drastically reduced the amount of waste sent to landfills while supplying electricity to thousands of homes.

The City also implemented a comprehensive recycling program, with strict laws requiring businesses and residents to sort their waste. Public education campaigns have played a vital role in changing attitudes toward waste management.

Metro System

A study on Shenzhen's metro system reveals that expanded and well-connected metro networks significantly reduce pollution by diverting on-road traffic to rail, cutting vehicle emissions. Stations integrated with transit-

oriented development further amplified these effects, showcasing how comprehensive rail systems can effectively mitigate urban air pollution.

Technology as a Catalyst

Shenzhen's success owes much to its embrace of technology. Smart city initiatives use big data, AI, and IoT (Internet of Things) to monitor air quality, manage traffic, and optimize energy use. For example, real-time air quality sensors provide data to policymakers and residents, enabling immediate action during pollution spikes. In addition, Shenzhen's tech sector has driven innovation in renewable energy and sustainable urban solutions.

High-Tech Fight for Clean Air

Shenzhen has leveraged advanced technology to enhance its air quality management systems. The City operates a comprehensive network of monitoring stations that collect

real-time data on pollutants such as PM2.5, sulfur dioxide, and nitrogen oxides. This data is integrated into a centralized platform that utilizes AI algorithms to analyze trends, predict pollution spikes, and identify hotspots. Additionally, Shenzhen employs drones equipped with sensors to inspect areas that are difficult to access, such as industrial zones and construction sites, further strengthening its enforcement capabilities.

In 2018, Shenzhen launched a real-time air monitoring system as part of its campaign to improve air quality. Automatic monitoring takes data from 74 PM2.5 monitoring sites, all connected to a unified platform.

Data-Assisted Enforcement: A Simple Yet Powerful Tool

Shenzhen has also harnessed the power of data to revolutionize air quality management. Using advanced monitoring technologies, the City collects two critical types of data hourly: emission levels from factories and a comprehensive air quality index. This data is not only meticulously gathered but also made publicly available, empowering citizens and

environmental advocates to monitor trends and hold authorities accountable.

"If a company is caught discharging pollutants these days, it becomes the subject of hourly inspections," an expert explained. This heightened level of scrutiny serves as a strong deterrent to potential violators while enabling authorities to respond swiftly to any incidents, he added.

Accountability at Every Level

Unlike in the past, when city and township officials were responsible for collecting environmental data—often leaving room for manipulation—data collection in Shenzhen is now centralized, automated, and technology-driven, ensuring accuracy and transparency. Experts note that this shift has effectively closed the loopholes that once allowed local authorities to "massage the results."

In addition, city officials are now held to strict performance standards set by higher authorities. Failure to meet air quality targets can result in demotions, fines, or other disciplinary actions. Experts explain that



this top-down accountability has created a powerful incentive for cities like Shenzhen to rigorously enforce environmental regulations.

Rigorous Enforcement: The Cornerstone of Shenzhen's Clean Air Success

Experts told Jaffna Monitor that while many industrial cities worldwide have struggled to achieve a clean environment, Shenzhen's remarkable improvement in air quality can be attributed to its stringent enforcement of environmental regulations. The City deploys dedicated inspection teams to conduct unannounced factory visits, ensuring strict compliance with pollution control measures. Non-compliant factories face severe penalties, including substantial fines, temporary suspension of operations, and, in extreme cases, permanent closure.

Shenzhen authorities told Jaffna Monitor, "We punish everyone who violates our environmental regulations, no matter their size or influence. There is no gray area when it comes to punishing environmental violators. Our approach is clear and uncompromising."

Public Engagement: Naming, Shaming, and Empowering

In addition to regulatory enforcement, Shenzhen has embraced public engagement as a powerful tool for environmental reform. A local resident told Jaffna Monitor, "Polluting companies are publicly named and shamed, with their violations highlighted in media reports and online platforms." This transparency, he explained, not only pressures businesses to clean up their operations but also empowers residents to hold companies accountable.

Citizens play an active role in this community-driven approach to pollution control. They can report violations through dedicated hotlines and mobile apps, creating a network of vigilant individuals committed to safeguarding the environment. This initiative has fostered a sense of responsibility among patriotic citizens who take pride in ensuring their City remains clean, orderly, and sustainable.

Navigating Future Hurdles

Environmental experts have also cautioned that while Shenzhen's initiatives have set benchmarks globally, sustaining these achievements in the long term will require constant vigilance and adaptation to emerging challenges. For instance, maintaining water quality and combating air pollution could become more complex as industrial and population density increases. The City's reliance on advanced technologies to monitor and address environmental issues, while effective, could face risks related to system scalability and data security.

A Model for the World

Shenzhen is a classic example of how massive economic growth and the construction of towering skyscrapers can coexist harmoniously with environmental sustainability, given strong commitment and visionary leadership. By minimizing corruption, integrating advanced technologies, enforcing effective governance, and fostering active public engagement, any city can transform environmental challenges into opportunities. This offers an inspiring model for a country like Sri Lanka, whose people have recently set aside their divisions and appear to have embraced a shared vision of development.

Killings, Truth, Justice and Healing amongst Tamils

PART 01



BY:

Jeevan Thiagarajah

Former Governor Northern Province/
Former Member Commissioner
Election Commission.

The elephant in the room

This piece written about events which unfolded commencing the 70's captures a transition from political processes to militancy and within the elimination or disbanding of armed groups and the silencing of advocacy and civil expression contesting the will of the primary proponents of militancy. It requires empathy for the feelings of those who survived as victims, imagination of the last moments of those whose lives were extinguished and even going into the minds of those responsible in the planning and execution.

The growth of militancy from peaceful politics is dark and troubling. The idealism replaced by the will of the gun becomes clearly evident. In the process killing and silencing of dissent was the means and order of the day. Be it within groups, on groups, amongst groups and civilians unconnected to groups. Net result being lives extinguished. Scores more were forcibly led to war, never to return home again. Very many suffered immense pain in mind and body. We have to date made no effort to account and be responsible for the hundreds of killings, disappearances and pain amongst Tamils caused by Tamils in the absence of a formal process which enables it.

I recall seeing the head of the suicide bomber who assassinated Dr. Neelan Tituchelvam on Kynsey Road and asking myself how did a human being become a human bomb exploding with clinical precision. It was a mind boggling example of the extent to which human beings had become programmed to kill and be killed.

This piece does not focus on what groups did by way of assassinations, killings, torture or disappearances of those who they fought with or eliminated i.e. armed forces and police and

politicians from mainstream political parties. That is for a national process to examine. Also set aside are those killings and atrocities carried out by the armed forces on the commands of select government functionaries since that is the subject of existing national and international narratives and testimonies and continuing scrutiny.

Conceptual framework for Reconciliation

Reconciliation is a complex concept because of its multidimensional nature: one can approach it through a variety of disciplines (Torrent Oliva 2011:20). The first one focuses on reconciliation as an outcome; a state in which parties have changed their relationships and are mutually recognising each other's goals and interests in a peaceful environment (Howard 2004:197; Bar-tal and Bennink 2004:11–15). The second perspective shifts attention to how reconciliation unfolds vis-à-vis motivations, goals, beliefs, and emotions of parties. According to this perspective, the victim and the perpetrator have an opportunity to transform the nature of their relationship into one that facilitates the emergence of a new social context that is accompanied by possibilities for a peaceful future (Daly and Sarkin 2004:180–182; Maoz 2004:225; Lederach 1997:101–110). Conceived as a process, reconciliation places weight not only on ending violence or conflict, but also on the steps that lead to the construction of new relationships in which both victims and perpetrators benefit from the new environment. The process takes place in efforts and activities that are deliberately meant to address unresolved conflict. I understand it is that as long as people previously involved in conflict do not undergo this process, the conflict persists and the potential for relapse is ever present.

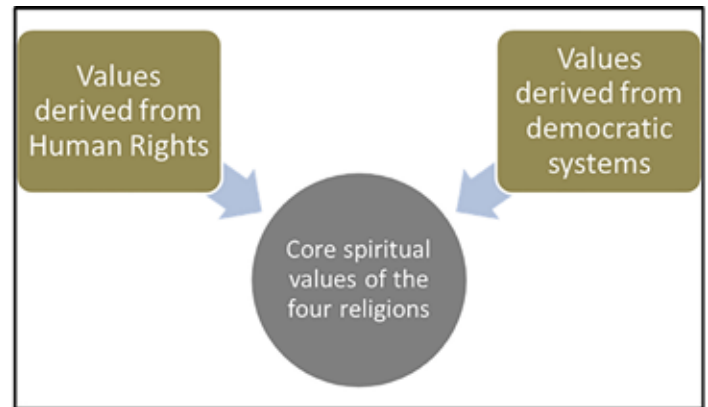
There is a general consensus that desired outcomes can be successfully achieved if the process embraces and promotes five fundamental prerequisites – truth, apology, forgiveness, reparation and promoting encounter. These should be implemented in chronological order as follows:

- The truth, or a close approximation of it, needs to be exposed to enable parties to understand their common history: an important basis for shared beliefs. However, appropriate mechanisms are needed to deal with complex situations since parties may find it difficult to eliminate bias in their narratives (Daly and Sarkin 2004:146).
- Apology marks the formal acceptance of responsibility by perpetrators, and is the basis for forgiveness by victims.
- Forgiveness embodies the values of love, empathy and mercy. Together with truth and apology, forgiveness constitutes the moral foundation of the reconciliation process.
- Reparation involves the retribution the perpetrator needs to pay to the victim in order to restore lost relationship.

The five prerequisites are to be pursued in a context of justice. But yet another challenge arises as to which approach to justice best serves the goal to sustain reconciliation.

Lessons Learnt Reconciliation Commission (LLRC)

The Commission expresses the view that “the country may not have been confronted by a violent separatist agenda, if the political consensus at the time of independence



had been sustained and policies had been implemented to build up and strengthen the confidence of the minorities around a system which had gained a reasonable measure of confidence.” (8.137)

The political grievances of the Tamil community stem from the breakdown of this consensus and the dismantling of the political contract it sustained.

The LLRC’s vision of the Sri Lankan identity is multi-ethnic and multi religious. It is based on full compliance with and observance of human



The LLRC Commissioners

rights that guarantees equality of citizenship for all. It is reinforced by the core moral and spiritual values shared by the four major world religions.

The value framework in the Report includes the following:

Truth. In all matters the commitment to the truth is a precondition of reconciliation. In regard to the past roots of the conflict, the LLRC advocates a searching reappraisal. In regard to the suffering caused by the conflict, the deaths of civilians, the missing persons and disappearances the truth must be fully uncovered both for the purpose of healing and bringing a closure to the anguish of survivors as well as for the purpose of ensuring the accountability of those who committed the crimes and violations of human rights.

Transparency. Truth goes with transparency – the conditions in which actions must be taken so that the truth is accessible to all the concerned persons. Transparency that provides full information to the concerned citizens would be an essential condition of reconciliation in all the actions taken on the issues that have been listed. The LLRC stresses that transparency goes together with the right to information.

Justice and Accountability. The LLRC report deals with accountability in three different contexts. The first is in the context of the war and the specific crimes and the violations of human rights committed in the course of the war. The second is the observance of human rights in post conflict conditions. The third is accountability pertaining to the roots of the conflict and the political processes that led to its escalation.

These three dimensions of justice and accountability reinforce and temper each other in the LLRC's approach to justice and reconciliation.

Status quo in Ceylon on the eve of Independence

The Soulbury Commission when it recommended the Constitution for an independent Ceylon regarded “communalism” or ethnicity as being the greatest impediment to the evolution of a united Ceylonese people. With the objective of mitigating the effect of the ethnic divisions, the Commission went to the extreme of removing all forms of communal representation in the democracy it established, hoping that the rule of the majority that will emerge thereby will develop on secular lines shorn of the ethno-cultural dimensions.

They entertained the unrealistic hope that the divisive character of ethnic identities will be removed from the polity and effaced. At the same time the Soulbury Commission



Lord Soulbury

recognized the deep –seated contradictions that were unique to Sri Lanka. It pointed out that the equality of citizenship which the new constitution upheld had to be achieved in a demographic situation in which there is a permanent majority of the Sinhala people much larger in size than all other ethnic groups (Tamil, Muslim, Burgher and others) put together. The proportions today are in the range of 75% Sinhala to 25% of all other minorities.

The Soulbury Commission observes that “the character of the majority–minority relations have been consequently shaped by these realities and governed by deep-seated pre-dispositions that were entrenched in the consciousness of both the majority and minority. The Tamil community and other minorities see themselves in a position of a permanent minority and perceive the Sinhala community as enjoying a position of an “unassailable majority”. These were the principal causes of apprehension and distrust. The Soulbury Commission concluded “that while constitutional and administrative safeguards were necessary to deal with these problems none of these safeguards will be adequate to guarantee equality of citizenship without a fundamental change in the pre-dispositions of both the majority and minority towards each other.” (LLRC 8.157).

The Soulbury Commissioners were objectively critical of the attitudes of both communities. The Soulbury Commission pointed out that elements of discrimination were perceived by the Tamil community even when actions are “based on reasons of sound policy”. It urged that the Tamil minority while focusing on their real grievances must guard against misperceptions of this type. At the same time, it emphasized that the majority community must “take the utmost care to avoid giving cause for any suspicion of unfairness or

partiality” and stated that this perception will persist until the minorities have an equitable share of power and responsibility for the affairs of government.

What the Soulbury Commission expected was a process of confidence building which would develop a strong base of mutual trust between the minorities and the majority leading to an equitable sharing of power and resources. What occurred however was quite the opposite.

In the newly emerging democracy, Sri Lanka’s post-independence English-speaking elites sought to respond and contain the electoral pressures with political ideologies which were ethno-centric, promoting the interests of their own ethnic constituency. They left little space for a multi-ethnic inclusive national identity. A decade after independence the island erupted in the first outbreak of ethnic violence in 1958. The conditions were set for a long spiral of violence and counter-violence.

Sri Lanka’s civil war which started in 1983 and went through several phases, interspersed by failed peace efforts is commonly divided into Eelam wars I (1983-1987), II (1990-1994), III (1995-2002) and IV (2006-2009), although the divide between ‘war’ and ‘peace’ was never as clear as this timeline suggests – war was preceded by other forms of violence including assassinations, riots, suicide attacks and killings of civilians, whilst periods of ‘peace’ were frequently preceded by high levels of violence.

Emergence of Tamil armed groups in dissent

It is virtually impossible to set a date for the genesis of Tamil militancy in Sri Lanka. After 1956 riots, a group of Tamils organized



Thangathurai and Kuttimani

and opened fire at the Sri Lankan army in Batticaloa. Two Sinhalese were killed when 11 Tamils, having between them seven rifles, fired at a convoy of Sinhalese civilians and government officials one night at a village near Kalmunai. There was another attack on army soldiers in Jaffna after Colombo stifled the Federal Party "satyagraha" in 1961, but no one was killed. Some of 20 men associated with the Federal Party thought Gandhisam had no place in such a separate state. At a meeting in Colombo, they christened their group Pulip Padai (Army of Tigers). On August 12, 1961, the Pulip Padai members converged at the historic Koneswaran Temple in the eastern port of town of Trincomalee and, standing in its holy precincts facing the sea took a solemn oath to fight for a Tamil homeland. A student wing called the Manavar Manram (student's council) was set up in 1963.

In 1969, Thangathurai and Kuttimani and a few friends gathered in Jaffna to form an informal group that the former wanted to name the Tamil Liberation Organization (TLO). It included among others Periya (big) Sothi, Chinna (small) Sothi, Chetti, Kannadi

(a radio mechanic), Sri Sabaratnam (TELO leader) and V. Prabhakaran (LTTE supremo). One man who drifted by but broke away to chart an independent course was Ponnudurai Sivakumaran, who was to become one of the first martyrs to the Tamil cause.

Earlier, in 1970, Ponnudurai Satyaseelan founded the Tamil Manavar Peravai (Tamil Students League), which was joined by Sivakumaran who attempted to assassinate Sri Lankan deputy minister for Cultural Affairs Somaweera Chandrasiri in September 1970 and Alfred Duraiyappah, the Jaffna Mayor, in February 1971.

The formation of TUF in 1972 led to the Tamil Elaingyar Peravai (TYL-Tamil Youth League) in January 1973. It was founded by some 40 youths, many of whom subsequently were in the forefront of the militant movement. The TYL drew support from Thangathurai, the TLO leader. Satyaseelan's arrest in February 1973 set off the second round of mass arrests in Jaffna and virtually crippled the TYL as well as the older Tamil Students League. Several young men languished in prison until 1977,

although some gained amnesty on the eve of the Kankesanthurai by-election in 1975.

The tragic appearance of Tamil insurgents dedicated to violent action against the government was a development in the 1970s becoming militant in 1972, when the government introduced standardization policies on university admission and the 9 accidental deaths which occurred in the course of a police attack on participants of an international Tamil conference held in Jaffna in 1974. The purpose of which was academic and cultural held previously only in Madras and Kuala Lumpur. The police officer who led the attack was promoted and the Mayor of Jaffna who cooperated was killed the following year.

Jaffna witnessed its first case of death by cyanide poisoning the next year. Sivakumaran had been lying low for a while, but took an active interest in the 1974 International Tamil Conference in Jaffna. He had been influenced by his parent's pro-Federal Party views. He believed that despite the need for militancy, the Federal Party was important and often compared Chelvanayagam with Mahatma Gandhi and the boys with Subash Chandra Bose.

Since breaking off from Thangathurai, Sivakumaran had set up his group, which came to be known as the Sivakumaran's group. On June 5, 1974, Sivakumaran was trapped by the police while attempting a bank robbery in Jaffna's Kopai town. He was 17 years of age and used to carry a cyanide pill. On that day he swallowed it without so much as an afterthought and died almost instantly. Thus, was born Sri Lanka's cyanide culture.

In 1974, Jaffna engulfed in protests when Bandaranaike visited the town to open a university campus. The Mayor, Duraiyappah did his best to bring crowds to her meeting.

The visit was preceded by several acts of violence which the police blamed on the newly-formed Tamil New Tigers (TNT) of Prabhakaran. Bombs were thrown at a police jeep in Kankesanthurai, a port town. Another bomb went off at the residence of a communist leader who was to be the premier's interpreter.

Two underground groups were active in 1975. The Thangathurai group, benefit of Kuttimani, and the TNT, which in informed circles came to be known as the Prabhakaran's group. In January 1975, a group of Sri Lankan Tamils residing in London formed the Eelam Revolutionary Organisation which took the acronym EROS. Although it failed to take roots in Sri Lankan Tamil areas for a long time, it played a key role in shaping the growth of militancy.

The Duraiyappah assassination was the first political murder in Sri Lanka's northeast. Chelvanayagam's election victory had queered the pitch for the Eelam campaign. The number of militants in Jaffna then could not have been more than 50. The popular perception among the ordinary Tamils was that the "boys", as the young guerrillas were called with adoration, were acting under the orders, if not the control, of the TUF and that they could and would be caged if need be.

On March 5, 1976 Prabhakaran led a raid on the state-run People's Bank at Puttur and escaped with a half a million rupees in cash and jewellery worth 200,000 rupees after holding the employees at gun point. Prabhakaran founded the LTTE on May 5, 1976.

From the Tamil standpoint, the 1977 polls were momentous in 3 ways.

1. For the 1st time, one of Sri Lanka's main parties admitted publicly that there existed a Tamil Problem.

2. For the 1st time, a Tamil party was propelled as the main opposition in the Sri Lankan Parliament.
3. The sweeping outcome in the northeast polls catapulted Tamil militancy.

Emergence of Uma Maheswaran and LTTE

Early on the morning of August 15, 1977, three unarmed constables stopped 3 boys riding bicycles at Puttur, Jaffna. Without warning, one of the boys took out a revolver and fired, injuring one of the policemen in the thigh. The cyclists escaped. The next day, police shot and killed four persons and wounded 21 others in a bloody shoot-out in Jaffna after the policemen were obstructed from seizing arms carried by some youths.

JR, angry at what he thought was the audacity of the "boys", ordered the army into Jaffna, where the old market was almost totally gutted in a fire the Tamils blamed on the security forces. The 1977 anti-Tamil riots had begun. Sinhalese mobs began attacking Tamils outside the northeast. For the first time, a large number of Hindu temples came under attack during the two weeks of arson and rioting, which left more than 300 people dead and many more wounded. Thousands of Tamils left their homes and fled to the northeast for safety. They included an estimated 40,000



Uma Maheswaran

Indian Tamils, many of whom became destitute overnight even though they were opposed to the Eelam campaign. Many of them went to Vavuniya in the North, where several voluntary groups helped them to begin a new life. Many were sent to Jaffna by 3 ships.

The riots provoked indignation in Tamil Nadu, which until then had remained largely indifferent to the plight of the island Tamils. The DMK, which only 4 years ago had handed over Kuttimani to the Sri Lankan authorities, organized a general strike and a mammoth procession that wound its way through the city to the office of the Deputy High Commissioner of Sri Lanka.

But in 1977, no Sinhalese living in Jaffna came under attack from Tamils. Until the Tamil militancy took deep roots in Jaffna, almost 10% of its population was Sinhalese, who were bakers, traders, civil servants and businessmen. The 1977 anti-Tamil riots were different from earlier Sinhalese onslaughts. In September, Thangathurai presided over a meeting at a temple in Thondaman Aru and decided to formally set up a militant group called the Tamil Eelam Liberation Army (TELA) and a political affiliate known as the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organization (TELO). By now, the most active militant groups in Jaffna were the ones led by Thangathurai and the LTTE.

In 1977, a soft-spoken land surveyor, Kadirgamapillai Nallainathan, better known as Uma Maheswaran, joined the LTTE. He was made the chairman of the central committee. Prabhakaran, younger to Uma by some 10 years, continued to be the group's military commander but remained largely in the background. In January 1978, Uma and Prabha made their way to Colombo. The two shot M. Canagaratnam, a Tamil MP who had won on a TULF ticket but switched allegiance to the UNP. He was shot and wounded in the

chest, neck and ribs but died a few months later. Canagaratnam's botched murder blew up Uma's cover and he gave up the open life. The police, embarrassed that Tamil militants could strike in Colombo, launched a vicious crackdown under the supervision of Inspector T.I. Bastiampillai of the CID. After rounding up several suspects in Jaffna, police issued "wanted" posters for 4 men: Uma, Chellappah Nagarajah, Thanam (who had been once driver to Chelvanayagam) and Kannadi. Little did the police know that one of the four was already dead. Chetti murdered Kannadi in cold blood at Poonagari after breaking out of the prison in the city of Anuradhapura in 1973.

A Split in the LTTE

In 1979, after the Thangathurai group shot dead 3 more policemen in Jaffna, JRJ replaced the Proscription of LTTE act with a more draconian Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA), clamped a state of emergency throughout Jaffna peninsula and sent more troops to the region. He also hand-picked Brigadier T.I. Weeratunge, Chief of the Army, to stamp out "the menace of terrorism in all its forms from the island" by December 31. The crackdown, for the first time, seriously disrupted the militant network. The mutilated bodies of 6 youths picked up from their homes on July 14 were found under a bridge. Because of this disruption, Thangathurai, Kuttimani and Prabhakaran fled to Tamil Nadu. Tamil militancy died down almost totally in 1980, but picked up again from early next year. There were growing differences within the militant ranks, particularly the LTTE which resulted in its split and the subsequent formation of PLOTE by Uma.

On April 5, Kuttimani Thangathurai and Thevan were arrested at Mannalkadal, near Point Pedro, while trying to escape in a boat

to India. Kuttimani had some gold on him, tried to shoot himself but was overpowered. It was the end of journey both for Kuttimani and Thangathurai, two of the original pillars of Tamil militancy. They were later brutally beaten to death in Colombo's Welikade jail during the July 1983 anti-Tamil riots.

The Changing Character of the Militants

In 1980, Jaffna University students published a paper called the Unarvu (Sensation) which put forward several Marxist slogans. About the same time the faction of the Tigers which the following year adopted the name of the P.L.O.T.E. started a paper with the name Puthiya Paathai (New Path). This paper took a political line critical of traditional parliamentary politics as well as of the hit and run tactics of the L.T.T.E. After two issues of the latter, Mr. Sunderam, a prominent person in the P.L.O.T.E., was assassinated by the L.T.T.E. while at the printers to bring out an issue of the paper. This was the first internal killing to surface publicly, although there had been several others before. Following this, two L.T.T.E. sympathizers Irai Kumaran and Umai Kumaran were killed by the P.L.O.T.E. Though people were alarmed, these incidents were not taken to be a sign of a deeper malaise. By 1986 these internal killings were to reach epidemic proportions.

The students of Jaffna University contributed considerably to the groups of the militant movement. The dedication of many of the students was such that they left their academic careers and went to rural areas and the Eastern Province to work for their organizations. Such persons were by nature intelligent, sensitive and bound to insist on democratic accountability from their leaders. With the rise of internal killings and autocratic leadership, these students became disillusioned.



From left to right: Leaders of EPRLF - Padmanabha, TELO - Sri Sabaratnam, EROS - Balakumaran, and LTTE -Prabhakaran.

By 1985 many of them started quitting their organizations to lead quiet lives. According to the testimony of their friends, several of those students who died, ended their lives in a state of disillusionment. The last three student union leaders up to 1985 had deep seated problems with the L.T.T.E. Two of them left the organization and one died while doing refugee work. By the latter part of 1985 the role of the students in the militant movement underwent a radical change. The students on the whole felt that the militant groups had gone astray and were locked in a war of attrition with each other. They felt this had brought the community to a dangerous brink. The main thrust of student action now was to: reform the militant movement through criticism and persuasion; provide relief for refugees; mediate between the public and the militants; and foster unity among the militant groups. Usually, the students did not go for confrontation with the militant groups but raised specific questions regarding their conduct. In April 1986 a demonstration from Vadamaratchi protesting the killing by the T.E.L.O. of T.E.L.O. members Das and four of

his colleagues was fired upon. The students negotiated with the E.P.R.L.F. and P.L.O.T.E. to protect and shelter the demonstrators. The bodies of three demonstrators killed were taken to the University. In doing refugee work the students involved took considerable risks in going to difficult areas. In this role the students were respected and also feared. Until the L.T.T.E.-T.E.L.O. clash, the L.T.T.E. found the student movement useful. Though it no longer provided recruits, its criticisms were mainly directed against the T.E.L.O. One reason for this was that the L.T.T.E.'s actions were more secretive, and could not be directly ascribed. Following the L.T.T.E.-T.E.L.O. clash, the L.T.T.E. moved to suppress the students. This virtually ended the University's role in the militancy. Students of the past who had helped the growth of the militancy with dedication felt that they had been meanly used. The intellectual polish of the students had been useful but the leadership of the L.T.T.E which was dominant by the end of 1986 had a different mind-set - a totalitarian mind-set.

To be continued...

The Human Cost of Corruption: Mother and Daughter Killed in Kilinochchi Accident

■
BY:
Our Reporter

A young mother and her innocent two-year-old daughter were tragically struck down by a tipper truck driven by a drunk driver involved in smuggling stolen sand. The truck collided with a motorbike carrying a family of four near the Kilinochchi Zonal Education Office.

The crash claimed two lives, leaving behind a grieving husband and a six-year-old elder daughter.

The accident instantly claimed the life of little Gajan Abivarni, just two years old. Her mother, Gajan Yalini, fought for her life for a few days but ultimately succumbed to her injuries. Varatheeswaran Gajan, 40, and their elder daughter, six-year-old Gajan Isainila, sustained severe injuries.



Devastated husband watches his wife's last rites from the ambulance, unable to perform them himself.

Gajan Yalini was later transferred to the Jaffna Teaching Hospital for advanced treatment but tragically passed away. The family revealed that they were on their way to celebrate Christmas together when the accident occurred.

In a scene so heartrending it could pierce even the coldest of hearts, the wounded father, Gajan, his body battered and broken, attended his wife's funeral in an ambulance. Unable to stand or move unaided, he could not perform the last rites for his beloved wife and daughter.



Rampant Sand Smuggling in Kilinochchi

This devastating incident has also drawn attention to the larger issue of rampant illegal sand smuggling in Kilinochchi. The area has become a hotspot for unchecked sand mining, reportedly carried out with the tacit approval of local politicians and law enforcement.

Visitors to Kilinochchi can witness scores of tipper trucks transporting smuggled sand at dangerous speeds. According to sources, police, who are tasked with curbing these illegal activities, are instead complicit in the operations, often taking bribes to let the trucks pass. Reports suggest that each tipper pays approximately LKR 1,000 as a bribe to police squads stationed on the roads. In some cases, special arrack bottles are allegedly offered as additional "favours."

A local source told Jaffna Monitor, "It's a common sight in Kilinochchi to see policemen standing on roads day and night, stopping tippers not to enforce the law, but to collect bribes. This practice has become normalized."

The Hidden Network: How Kilinochchi's Sand Mafia Operates with Impunity

Sources say that a well-organized and deeply entrenched system supports the sand mafia in Kilinochchi, operating with precision and efficiency. Even seemingly ordinary lanes play a critical role in smuggling operations within this shadow network. A few shopkeepers and homeowners along these routes often act as informants, or "recces," closely monitoring the movements of law enforcement officers and tipping off smugglers in real-time.

Locals note that what is particularly troubling

is the involvement of Kilinochchi's youth in this illicit trade. A significant number of young people, enticed by the prospect of easy money, find themselves entangled in the web of sand smuggling. For many, it is a quick way to earn a living, with little consideration for the long-term consequences—both for themselves and their community.

A local source, speaking to Jaffna Monitor on the condition of anonymity, shed light on the deeper layers of this operation. "If you trace the roots of every sand mafia network," the source revealed, "it invariably leads to a Tamil politician or someone closely connected to a politician."

Unchecked sand smuggling has caused severe environmental damage, with both major and minor rivers losing their riverbeds, leading to widespread ecological degradation. Even in the more remote areas of Kilinochchi, tractors can often be seen stationed in the middle of drying rivers, extracting sand from the riverbeds without any intervention.

This tragedy has sparked outrage among Kilinochchi residents, who are demanding immediate action. Calls for stricter enforcement of laws against drunk driving and reckless vehicle operation are intensifying, along with demands to put an end to illegal sand mining.

Recently, locals staged a protest against reckless driving, emphasizing that those responsible, regardless of political affiliations, must be held accountable.

INTERVIEW

Can Jaffna Become the Next Shenzhen? Its Port Holds the Key: says Editor-in-Chief of Shenzhen Daily and Eye Shenzhen

 Jaffna Monitor
in Shenzhen

Sun Jin, also known as Florence Sun



BY:

Our Special Correspondent

Sun Jin, known internationally as Florence Sun, is the editor-in-chief of Shenzhen Daily and Eye Shenzhen, two of China's prominent English-language publications. With a background in English Language and Literature from Nanjing University and an International MBA from Peking University, Sun Jin brings a wealth of experience to the forefront of English-language journalism in China. Her career has included key roles at CGTN and Shenzhen Special Zone Daily, where she has played an active role in documenting Shenzhen's rapid transformation and its emergence as a global economic hub.

In this exclusive interview with Jaffna Monitor, Sun Jin reflects on the policies and strategies behind Shenzhen's evolution, its role in China's broader urbanization efforts, and what cities like Jaffna can learn from its successes.

According to you, what key decisions and strategies were instrumental in driving this remarkable growth and fostering innovation?

This success can be largely attributed to foresighted policies and the establishment of the Shenzhen Special Economic Zone (SEZ). Within the SEZ framework, several pivotal decisions and strategies have driven the city's rapid growth and relentless innovation.

One of the foundational decisions was the introduction of the "Special Economic Zone" concept. In 1979, the Chinese central government decided to implement

special policies and flexible measures in the Guangdong and Fujian provinces, granting these regions greater autonomy. Shenzhen, alongside Zhuhai, Shantou, and Xiamen, was selected as a pilot city for the SEZ initiative, marking the official launch of this transformative policy.

The cornerstone of Shenzhen's transformation lies in Deng Xiaoping's reform and opening-up policy, which emphasized economic restructuring and the attraction of foreign investment. The SEZ framework created a unique environment for experimenting with new economic policies and management systems, fostering unprecedented growth. In my view, while policy played a crucial role in Shenzhen's development, what truly set it apart was its relentless focus on innovation, particularly in technology research and development. The city made significant investments in education, research institutions, and innovation infrastructure, cultivating an urban culture of creativity and entrepreneurship.

Shenzhen's SEZ experiment introduced special tax incentives to attract foreign investment and granted companies greater independence from the central government in international trade. Market-driven growth spurred the production of export-oriented commodities, catapulting the city onto the global stage.

The city's development was built on four pillar industries: advanced technology, robust finance, efficient logistics, and a vibrant entrepreneurial culture. Today, Shenzhen is home to some of the world's leading information and communication technology giants, including Huawei, Tencent, ZTE, and DJI, the global leader in drone technology. As industrialization progressed, Guangdong began transitioning into a post-industrial society, evolving into an advanced



manufacturing and global innovation hub. In this grand vision, Shenzhen plays a pivotal role as a global center for high-tech innovation, venture capital, and social media.

Shenzhen is often highlighted as the quintessential example of China's 1980s approach to urbanization, which intertwined with the broader strategy of opening up the economy. Could you elaborate on the defining characteristics of this approach and why Shenzhen became the ideal canvas for this transformative experiment?

Shenzhen is perhaps the most vivid reflection of China's urbanization over the past few decades. Shenzhen's rise was intricately linked to the nation's broader economic opening-up policy. The defining features of this approach and the reasons why Shenzhen became the perfect testing ground for such an ambitious

urbanization experiment can be explored as follows:

1. Rapid Urbanization:

Shenzhen underwent extremely rapid urbanization, transforming from a small town with a population of just over 20,000 to a major city within a short period. This rapid transformation was fueled by significant investment, infrastructure development, and population growth.

2. Economic Opening-Up:

Shenzhen's urbanization was closely linked to China's economic opening-up policy. As a special economic zone, Shenzhen benefited from preferential policies that attracted foreign investment, technology, and management expertise.

3. Market-Oriented Reforms:

Shenzhen served as a testing ground for various market-oriented reforms, such as the reform of the investment system, labor market reforms, and price deregulation. These reforms

helped to create a more dynamic and efficient economy.

4. Infrastructure Development:

Significant investment was made in the city's infrastructure, including roads, bridges, public transportation, and utilities.

Shenzhen became an ideal canvas for development due to several factors, including its geographical location, policy support, immigrant culture, and entrepreneurial spirit. These elements combined to make Shenzhen a successful model for urbanization in China and beyond.

Until recently, industrial transformation and innovation were driven by Shenzhen, with strong support from Guangdong and the Pearl River Delta region.

The region entered a new phase with the launch of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA) blueprint in February 2018. The GBA connects nine cities in Guangdong, including Shenzhen, Guangzhou, and Dongguan, along with the special administrative regions of Hong Kong and Macao. This initiative aims to integrate these metropolises into a cohesive economic powerhouse, much like San Francisco's Silicon Valley in its global influence and innovation. With a population of approximately 125 million, the GBA fosters collaboration in technology, finance, and infrastructure, positioning Shenzhen as a critical hub within this dynamic network. Additionally, I want to elaborate on one particular aspect: Shenzhen's urban culture, which emphasizes passion, diversity, and tolerance. Nearly every young individual who comes to Shenzhen arrives with a dream—to pursue their career goals, achieve financial success, or follow their loved ones. They are highly motivated and often put

in much more effort than their peers back in their hometowns.

The slogan, "Once you come here, you are already a Shenzhener," perfectly exemplifies the city's tolerant and welcoming culture. This mindset has also played a significant role in Shenzhen's success.

As Shenzhen rapidly expanded, what urban planning strategies were implemented to handle population growth while maintaining its status as a livable city? How does the city balance infrastructure development with quality of life?

Shenzhen has implemented comprehensive planning and zoning regulations to ensure orderly urban development. These regulations govern the allocation of land for various uses, including residential, commercial, industrial, and green spaces, promoting a balanced and sustainable urban environment.

Public transportation-oriented development (TOD) is also a key priority in the city, encompassing subways, buses, and bike-sharing systems. By integrating transportation and land-use planning, Shenzhen has created more livable and accessible communities.

Known as "A City of Thousands of Parks," Shenzhen is often described as a mountain-sea tapestry for its extensive green infrastructure. The city has invested significantly in green initiatives, including parks, green corridors, and urban gardens. These green spaces enhance air quality, offer recreational opportunities, and contribute to the city's overall livability.

I would like to reference renowned architect



Pablo Laguarda from New York City, who was previously featured in an exclusive interview with us. He observed some remnants of poorly coordinated planning and construction projects in Shenzhen. Reflecting on its past, he remarked that 20 years ago, Shenzhen was still a city "devoid of any urban character, cultural venues, and public spaces.

"We had heard much about Shenzhen's incredible high-rise buildings and skyscrapers and their contribution to the city's modern, even futuristic, appearance," Pablo and his colleague John noted.

However, what truly exemplifies Shenzhen's transformation into a first-tier international city is its commitment to promoting public-friendly and environmentally conscious

projects. Green corridors and sustainable initiatives are now given priority, showcasing the city's forward-thinking vision.

Balancing infrastructure development with quality of life involves several key elements:

1. Affordable Housing Policies: Shenzhen has implemented measures to ensure an adequate supply of high-quality, affordable housing for both renting and purchasing. These policies aim to address the housing needs of various income groups and promote social stability.

2. Efficient Public Services: The city has heavily invested in expanding and enhancing public services, including education, healthcare, and public safety. By ensuring these

services are efficient and accessible, Shenzhen has maintained a high quality of life for its residents, even amidst rapid urban growth.

3. Community Engagement: Shenzhen actively encourages community involvement in urban planning and development. By including residents in the decision-making process, the city has fostered more inclusive and responsive urban environments.

4. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): Shenzhen has embraced sustainable urban development principles, such as energy efficiency, water conservation, and waste reduction. These initiatives help mitigate the environmental impact of urbanization and pave the way for a more sustainable future.

Shenzhen is frequently described as mainland China's answer to Hong Kong, given its rapid development and global influence. In what ways has Shenzhen mirrored Hong Kong's success, and how has it distinguished itself as a unique entity in China's broader urban and economic strategy? How has this impacted migration patterns, especially the decline in Chinese youths moving to Hong Kong?

Shenzhen and Hong Kong are often compared for their high levels of economic freedom and rapid development. Shenzhen's early growth was significantly influenced by its proximity to Hong Kong, benefiting from both capital and the relocation of industries from Hong Kong. With limited space for expansion, Hong Kong transferred lower value-added industries to the Pearl River Delta, enabling it to focus on its core strengths in finance, education, and

other service sectors. This strategy aligns with sound economic development principles and represents a natural progression; in this regard, Shenzhen has effectively emulated Hong Kong's model.

Practically speaking, Hong Kong's development remains deeply interconnected with the Pearl River Delta, especially Shenzhen. Nevertheless, the artificial barriers created by "identity politics" have isolated Hong Kong from the mainland, causing hesitation among many young people to engage with it.

In contrast, Shenzhen, as a city built on immigration, has fostered an effective relationship between the government and society. Many of Shenzhen's decision-making processes are open and transparent. Policies are shaped by public input but are not overly influenced by special interests or narrow "public opinions." Instead, the government prioritizes the overall well-being of society. This balanced approach has ensured both economic growth and social stability.

Shenzhen and Colombo were established as sister cities in 2014, aiming to foster trade, investment, culture, and technology cooperation. How has this partnership evolved, and what tangible impacts has it had on the economic and cultural development of both cities?

I don't have extensive information about the friendship city relationship between Shenzhen and Colombo, but I would like to share some inspiring examples of medical mutual aid that have strengthened the bond between these two cities. Shenzhen's "One Belt, One Road Public



"Welfare Tour" has provided cross-border assistance in Sri Lanka, helping local patients with cataracts and cleft lips and palates embark on the path to recovery. Meanwhile, Sri Lanka, renowned for having the world's highest cornea donation rate, has brought the gift of sight to residents of Shenzhen.

I was mesmerized to learn that Sri Lanka, with a population of just over 20 million, has over 1.1 million individuals voluntarily registered as cornea donors after death. It is heartwarming to know that from the 1960s to April 2015, Sri Lanka donated more than 71,000 corneas to 57 countries and over 140 regions worldwide. Among these, over 2,000 corneas were donated to China, greatly benefiting Shenzhen.

To reciprocate this generosity, the Shenzhen Foreign Affairs Office organized the "One Belt, One Road Public Welfare Tour" delegation to visit Colombo. They provided medical assistance to local patients with cleft lips, palates, and cataracts.

Renowned Shenzhen ophthalmologist Dr. Yao Xiaoming led a team of experts from Shenzhen Eye Hospital and Xiamen University Xiamen Eye Center to Colombo, where they performed surgeries on 1,000 cataract patients, expressing their gratitude for Sri Lanka's cornea donations to China.

In recent years, Shenzhen and Colombo have deepened their exchanges and cooperation in the medical field. The Shenzhen Foreign Affairs Office has fully integrated social resources and mobilized non-governmental organizations to actively participate, fostering people-to-people connectivity through medical collaboration.

Shenzhen has seen significant growth in tourism, attracting millions of visitors to attractions like Window

of the World and OCT Loft. What strategies have driven this success? In your view, how can Sri Lanka emulate Shenzhen's success in the tourism sector?

Shenzhen's tourism development can be attributed to several key factors:

1. Government Support: Over the past decade, the Shenzhen government has actively promoted the tourism industry by providing substantial funding and allocating land resources. Their efforts aim to create a unique and diverse urban identity for Shenzhen.

2. Technological Innovation: Shenzhen has embraced technology to enhance the tourist experience. Mobile apps for navigation, ticketing, and information sharing improve accessibility and convenience for visitors. Moreover, leveraging digital marketing strategies through social media and digital platforms has enabled the city to reach broader audiences and showcase its attractions in real-time.

For a historically rich country like Sri Lanka, I believe the following strategies could be employed to boost its tourism sector:

1. Emphasize Cultural Heritage: By highlighting its rich history, traditions, and natural beauty, Sri Lanka can develop unique attractions that appeal to global visitors.

2. Invest in Infrastructure: Enhancing transportation networks and improving facilities will make it easier for tourists to explore the country, significantly improving their overall experience.

3. Leverage Technology: Adopting smart tourism solutions, such as mobile apps

for travel planning and virtual tours, can streamline operations and enhance the visitor experience, making travel more efficient and enjoyable.

By implementing these strategies, Sri Lanka can effectively strengthen its tourism sector and attract a larger number of visitors.

How has Shenzhen balanced cultural preservation with modernization, and what lessons can Sri Lanka draw from its approach?

Shenzhen is a quintessential immigrant city, home to people from diverse backgrounds and regions with varying demands. Its development has flourished through the fusion of multiple cultures. In its early stages, Shenzhen faced significant challenges due to the lack of foreign and Hong Kong investment. However, after overcoming these initial hurdles, the city shifted its focus to prioritizing domestic capital, fostering the growth of a substantial number of local enterprises.

When a city is dominated by foreign investment, it inevitably becomes more susceptible to external influences, making it difficult to withstand global changes. Conversely, if a city isolates itself from foreign investment, it may struggle to keep up with modern advancements. Shenzhen has successfully struck a balance between domestic and foreign capital, aided by its institutional innovations rooted in the principles of a socialist market economy with Chinese characteristics.

For countries like Sri Lanka, which have deep cultural roots, there is less need to be concerned about the impact of external cultures. Instead, the emphasis could be on



shifting mindsets and fostering a more open attitude toward external ideas and influences, which could greatly benefit the city's development.

Shenzhen is now regarded as the 'Silicon Valley of Hardware.' How did the city develop an ecosystem that fosters technological innovation?

Shenzhen's emergence as the "Silicon Valley of Hardware" is the result of a confluence of factors that have fostered an environment conducive to technological innovation:

1. Government Supportive Policies:

Shenzhen's city government plays an active role in supporting innovation by implementing policies that provide funding, tax benefits, talent incentives, and other support for technology companies. The city

has established a robust innovation ecosystem to promote the growth of deep-tech firms and the integration of scientific and technological innovation with industries. Additionally, the government allocates no less than 30% of municipal-level scientific research funds to basic and applied research, supporting groundbreaking work in cutting-edge fields and core technologies.

2. Strong Market Demand and Robust

Manufacturing Base: As one of the world's largest hubs for electronic products, Shenzhen boasts significant market demand and a well-established industrial chain that drives companies to innovate continuously. Its comprehensive hardware supply chain facilitates rapid responses to market needs, from design and prototyping to large-scale production. This makes Shenzhen a magnet for hardware innovators and entrepreneurs worldwide, enabling them to turn innovative

ideas into tangible products. The city has nurtured numerous high-tech giants in intelligent hardware, AI hardware, and IoT, creating an industrial cluster effect that drives technological and industrial development.

3. Talent Pool: Shenzhen benefits from a diverse and highly skilled workforce, bolstered by an influx of talent from across China and abroad. The city has established strong partnerships with universities and research institutions to advance education and R&D in technology fields. Its culture of innovation and entrepreneurship further inspires individuals to pursue careers in the tech industry, strengthening its talent pipeline.

4. Culture of Innovation and Entrepreneurship: Shenzhen is renowned for its entrepreneurial spirit, characterized by a "make it happen" mindset that encourages risk-taking and experimentation. This culture has resulted in a high rate of startup formation.

5. Access to Capital: Shenzhen boasts a vibrant investment ecosystem comprising venture capital, private equity, and government funding. Home to one of China's three stock exchanges, the city attracts investors eager to support its innovative startups and technology companies. Numerous tech-focused accelerators and incubators further aid early-stage companies in scaling their operations and achieving growth.

Shenzhen's diverse and youthful population is a key driver of its economic vibrancy. What factors have made the city so attractive to migrants and young people?

Shenzhen attracts a significant number of migrants and young people primarily due to the following factors:

1. Economic Development and Job Opportunities: As one of China's major economic centers, Shenzhen boasts a rapidly growing economy and abundant job. This robust economic growth provides a conducive environment for career advancement, particularly appealing to the younger population.

2. Migration Culture and Policy Environment: Shenzhen's strong migrant culture and transparent, relaxed policies make it highly attractive to newcomers. The philosophy of "once you come, you are a Shenzhener" is deeply ingrained, creating an inclusive environment that helps newcomers integrate seamlessly into city life.

3. Young Population Structure: As one of China's youngest cities, Shenzhen has a vibrant and energetic atmosphere fueled by its youthful demographic. This abundance of young people injects energy and innovation into the city, fostering a dynamic environment conducive to creativity and progress.

4. Cultural Diversity and Inclusiveness: Shenzhen's cultural inclusiveness and acceptance of individuals from diverse backgrounds create fertile ground for innovation and cultural exchange. The city's blend of migrant and reform cultures forms a unique identity that values exploration, pioneering spirit, innovation, openness, and tolerance.

How can Jaffna effectively adopt strategies from Shenzhen's port development to maximize the potential

of the Kankesanthurai (KKS) port and drive regional economic growth?

Based on Shenzhen's success as a major port city, I believe Jaffna can draw several lessons to unlock the full potential of the Kankesanthurai (KKS) port for imports and exports. Firstly, Jaffna should prioritize enhancing infrastructure and connectivity around the KKS port to ensure seamless logistics and transportation. Shenzhen has actively advanced the development of smart ports, employing cutting-edge technologies such as advanced applications and artificial intelligence to optimize transportation efficiency. By offering services like LCL (Less-than-Container-Load) consolidation and port-bonded warehouse facilities, Shenzhen delivers convenient shipping solutions tailored to small and medium-sized enterprises.

Secondly, Jaffna can adopt a proactive approach to attracting foreign investments and partnerships, mirroring Shenzhen's strategy of leveraging international collaborations to stimulate port activities. Lastly, Jaffna should emphasize skill development and training programs for the local workforce to meet the evolving demands of a growing port industry, just as Shenzhen prioritized investment in human capital to drive the expansion of its port.

How have Shenzhen Daily and EyeShenzhen evolved to become key platforms for narrating Shenzhen's growth and connecting with a global audience?

From my perspective as the editor-in-chief, Shenzhen Daily and EyeShenzhen have been instrumental in documenting and shaping the city's remarkable growth story. Established in 1997, Shenzhen Daily has evolved into a cutting-edge multimedia service provider, serving as a distinctive window for the world to witness Shenzhen's dynamic development. Meanwhile, EyeShenzhen has emerged as the city's new flagship platform, offering diverse content in nine languages to a global online audience.

EyeShenzhen not only provides valuable information services but has also built an extensive network that connects people and institutions worldwide. By fostering meaningful connections both online and offline, it has created an influential community dedicated to narrating Shenzhen's stories and showcasing its vibrant transformation to the world.

“Nathaswara Osaiyile” (நாதஸ்வர ஒசையிலை): An ancient art form that defines a people

Part-2



BY:

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



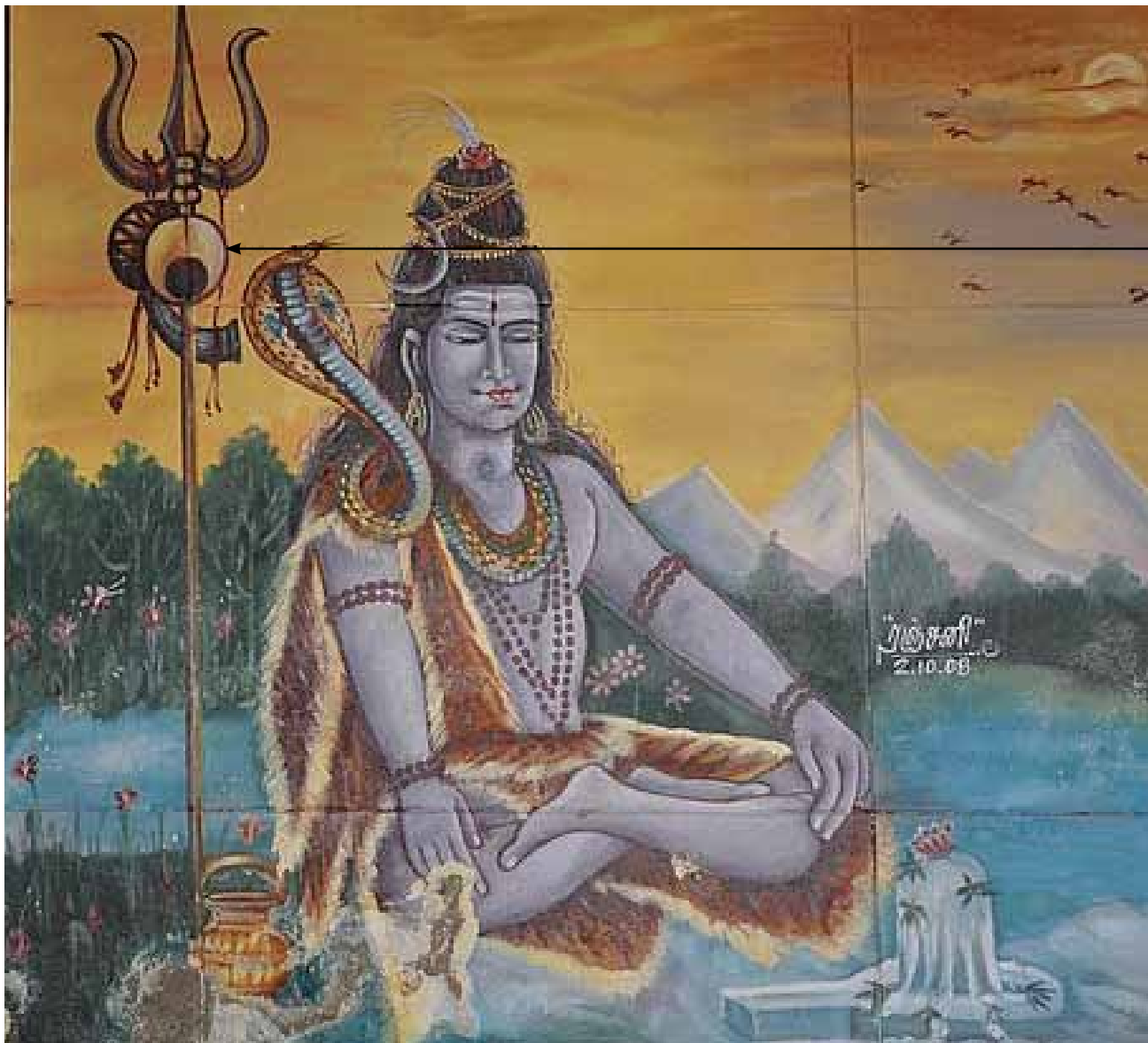
A belief that is commonly prevalent amongst sections of society – usually with strong ethno-nationalistic leanings, is that a dominant and pure culture that was native to their country or community was influenced (or ‘polluted’/‘diluted’) by extraneous influences over a long period, resulting in a less ‘purer’ or less ‘desirable’ version of the original culture to rule the day.

Attempts to identify and distil out this ‘pure’ or ‘original’ culture then becomes the holy grail of these ethno-nationalistic purists and has formed the basis of many sectarian conflicts. Even the Sri-Lankan ‘ethnic’ conflict can be traced to the emergence of such forces - within the middle classes of the Sinhala and Tamil communities, during the late 19th through to the late 20th centuries. Such pursuits are usually futile as the reality in many countries – including Sri Lanka and India, is more complex than the simple linear narrative presented by such cultural purists. A study of the history of musical traditions provides a clear insight into this

process of confluence of diverse influences. When one critically observes the popular narratives around the history of music, one clearly sees attempts to sanctify certain forms of music as 'indigenous', 'pure' or 'divine' and downgrade the position of other musical traditions to that of an extraneous 'pollutant'. In South India and amongst Sri Lankan Tamils this categorisation is usually aligned along social (or caste) structures (*T M Krishna, A Southern Music: The Carnatic Story* and *T M Krishna, Sebastian & Sons: A Brief History of Mrdangam Makers*). The evolution of musical traditions however is one of corporation, cross-fertilisation and gradual evolution leading to new forms of music that are best described as the 'joint heritage' of all people

living in these lands and sometimes across national borders. The history of nathaswaram/thavil music in Sri Lanka – with its current dominant position in the cultural lives of Sri Lankan Tamils, is no exception. How and where did these instruments originate is therefore an interesting academic question.

The percussion instruments, crafted from domesticated animal-hide – usually goat, buffalo or cows, have been in widespread use amongst our early ancestors. Early South Indian and Sri Lankan literature refers to 'Parai', 'Udukkai', 'Bera' and 'Mattalam' as some of the instruments that have been in use (*Jim Sykes, The Musical Gift: Sonic generosity in Post-war Sri Lanka*) for centuries and these



The 'Udukkai' as part of Hindu iconography representing the 'nadam' or the primal sound of creation. Image adapted from Wikimedia commons under the Creative Commons License

instruments most definitely predate the Thavil – the focus of the current series of articles. There is extensive reference to ‘Parai’ (பறை) in the Sangam Literature (300 BC-300AD). The ‘Vedda’ (වෙද්දා or வேட்டர்) communities – the aboriginal people of Sri Lanka, certainly used such percussion instruments and continue to do so to the present day (*Jim Sykes, The Musical Gift: Sonic generosity in Post-war Sri Lanka*). Some of these instruments – such as the Udukkai, have been part of the Hindu mythology and iconography from time immemorial and as such have received an aura of mysticism and/or divinity associated with them.

The ‘Udukkai’, ‘Parai’ (or the ‘Bera’) and ‘Mattalam’ are popular instruments to the present day in the ‘Nattu-Koothu’ (நாட்டு கூத்து) or ‘Koothu’ (கூத்து) performances in the Eastern province in Sri Lanka and beyond. These instruments are also commonly used in the Sinhala ‘Nadagam’ (or නාදගම/ நாட்டிய நாடகம்) performances. Different adaptations of these instruments are also used in temple functions and other ritualistic performances amongst the Sinhala speaking communities – particularly those in the Sabaragamuwa, coastal and Kandyan regions. There is an emerging consensus amongst musicologists that the tradition of ‘Koothu’ and folk singing (நாட்டு பாடல்) is a distinct form of music and dance native to this region, and predates Carnatic or Hindustani music – both in Sri Lanka and in South India, even though the latter came to dominate the musical discourses due to the dominant societal position of its proponents. Despite the marginalisation of these traditional instruments and the artists who performed them (attributed to the expansion of the Vijayanagara/Maratha empires into South India and the consequent subjugation of Tamil music and musicians), there are currently some clear signs that suggest the welcome resurgence of these art forms within the Tamil community. Even

though it is hard to determine when the transition took place, it is likely that the grand ‘Periya melam’ (பெரிய மேளம்) or Thavil is likely to have evolved from these early genre of percussion instruments – ‘Parai’, ‘Udukkai’, ‘Bera’ and ‘Mattalam’, that were used widely within nomadic musicians in South India/ Sri Lanka,. The early versions of Thavil were made in Tanjavur and even to this day, the Thavil makers of Tanjavur remain popular and distinctive. The Thavil is a cylindrical structure carved from a block of jackfruit wood. Layers of animal hide - usually from the buffalo and goat, are stretched over the two sides of the hollow shell using different levels of tension on each side. The tension may be altered further by adjusting the position of the hoops of hemp used to firmly attach the skin to the shell. The diameter of one side is slightly larger than the other and the combined differences in tension and diameter enables pitch blending and differences in the tone between the two sides. One side of the drum is played with a short stick made of hardened wood and the fingers covered with special ‘thimble’ like structures are used to play the other side of the thavil.

It is equally tempting to reflect on the possible evolution of Nathaswaram over time. As there are no written historic records, we are only able to speculate as to how nathaswaram may have evolved to its current shape and form. Wind instruments are broadly based on the principle of creating sounds by blowing into a hollow pipe(s). The sound is produced by blowing air directly across a sharp edge (or lip plate) thus creating vibrations in the column of air within the pipe. The flute and the piccolo are examples where this method is deployed. Alternatively, air blown in can be used to create vibrations of a reed (a thin piece of material) which then causes vibrations of the air column held within a cylindrical object. On the basis of how the sound is created, wind instruments may be broadly classified into non-reed instruments (Flute and piccolo)

or reed instruments (Clarinet, saxophone, oboe, bassoon and the nathaswaram). The reed based instruments may use a single reed (Saxophone, clarinet etc.), double reeds (oboe, bassoon, nathaswaram etc.) or even quadruple reeds (the Thai 'pinai' or the Arabic 'pii'). Combining this basic structural information of reed based wind instruments and the ethno-social dynamics of nomadic musicians in India, it is possible to make some inferences on how the nathaswaram may have evolved into its current form. In this context, few other double reed instruments used by such nomadic groups in Central and South Asia become relevant. As no written records exist, any conclusions made in this respect are based on inferences rather than hard evidence, and as such, are best considered as a hypothesis rather than an established fact.

1. Pungi (or Mahudi – மகுடி): The Pungi is a musical instrument that originates from the Indian subcontinent where wind - blown into a hollow reservoir, is channelled into two cylindrical pipes, each containing a vibrating reed. This instrument has been used for centuries by snake charmers of North (Sindh and Rajasthan) and South India (Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh in particular). Kuravars (கூர்வர் or குறவர்) are an indigenous ethnic Tamil community whose roots can be traced to the Kurunji Hills. The Sangam literature refers to this community extensively with references to poets, saints and even gods (and goddesses) whose origins were

traced to this community. Changing socio-economic conditions, accelerated during the Vijayanagara period (14th-17th century) and the subsequent colonial era reduced these – once thriving, communities to poverty and a nomadic life style with snake charming being one of the trades commonly adopted by its members. The Pungi (மகுடி) was used extensively for this purpose, and may be one of the earliest double reed musical instrument on record.

The structure and the way it is used/held in performance suggests that the modern grand nathaswaram may have had a more humble beginning amongst these communities. The popularity of compositions such as 'Mahudi' in the raga 'Punnagavaraali' (புன்னகவராளி) - similar to melodies played by traditional snake charmers, at classical nathaswaram concerts to this day adds some credence to this claim. Furthermore, until recently the nathaswaram concerts also included the use of a separate drone pipe (கூத்து குழல் or ஊமை குழல்), which was used to create a constant sound (pitch or Sruti- சுருதி) for the concert, thus separating out the two pipes that were integrated within a single shell in the construction of the Pungi. These indirect evidences do suggest that the nathaswaram may in fact be a derivative resulting through a series of modifications made to the humble Pungi - however weak this claim may be, when seen through the eyes of modern scientific rigor.



Figure 2: Pungi (or kFb): perhaps one of the oldest double reed instruments used within nomadic communities. Whereas one of the pipes was used to generate a constant drone-like sound, the other pipe – equipped with multiple holes, was used to generate varying tunes (Figure adapted from Wikimedia Commons, under the Creative Common License)



Figure 3: A Pungi (or kFb) in use by a nomadic musician for snake charming. The fingers are applied to the shorted pipe used to create the melody, whereas the longer pipe produces the background drone like sound which produces the pitch (or Sruti-RUjp) (Figure adapted from Wikimedia under the Creative Commons Licence)

2. Shehnai: The Shehnai is a double reed instrument, which resembles a nathaswaram both in shape and the kind of sound produced. Like the Nathaswaram it is made of wood with a flared bell shaped end and is in widespread use in North India. Wikipedia claims (without providing any direct references) that the Shehnai “*is thought to have been developed by improving upon the Pungi*” (or மருடி). Different versions of Shehnai-like instruments are in common use in Western India, Nepal and the state of Karnataka. In Sri Lanka too similar instruments – known as ‘Horanava’ in Sinhala and ‘Sornali’ in Tamil, have been used along with percussion instruments such as ‘Bera’, ‘Mattalam’ and ‘Parai’ in temple processions and in street plays (*Jim Sykes, The Musical Gift: Sonic generosity in Post-war Sri Lanka*).

The term Shehnai is derived by combining two words from Persia (‘shah’ – meaning king; and ‘nai’ or ‘ney’ – meaning a wind instrument like the flute). This suggests that this instrument may have originated in or around Persia and may have been used in royal palaces, processions or ceremonies. It is equally tempting to speculate that similar



Figure 4A: Shehnai: A double reed wind instrument currently in common use both in India and in Sri Lanka (Figure adapted from Wikimedia Commons, under the Creative Commons Licence)



Figure 4B: A Tribal Shehnai player. Note the similarities with the Nathaswaram in how it is used in practice. Figure adapted from Wikimedia Commons, under the Creative Commons Licence)

musical traditions may have been introduced into the Indian subcontinent at some time point, over the very long period of historical connections between India and Central Asia. These connections range from the early Indo-Aryan migration over 1800 years ago through the extensive trade links between Arabia/Persia and India culminating in the Mughal invasion between the 10th-16th centuries. When in this very long time period did Persian musical instruments become part of the musical landscape in India is hard to determine and is beyond the scope of this article. Whenever it may have occurred, it found a receptive audience – already familiar with reed instruments such as the Pungi, who then may have adapted it further to suit their own tastes and desires.

3. Zurna: The Shehnai itself may have been derived from another similar instrument called the Zurna which is used across central and west Asia. Wikipedia comments that

images of Zurna are visible in artwork by the Indo-European people living in West Asia during the bronze-age. It is also a double reed instrument usually accompanied by a bass drum in Armenian, Anatolian and Assyrian folk music. The Zurna was known in Persia from the 6th century and spread beyond Persia following the spread of Islam and the Ottoman Empire.

The long and conical wind instrument – Karna, that was made around 500BC and currently kept in the Persepolis museum in Iran broadly has many structural similarities to Zurna and may represent its early beginnings.

4. The stone Nathaswarams of South India:

Whilst the modern nathaswarams are made of wood, there are two unique instruments that are made of granite stone. These two specimens are kept as unique treasures at the Kumbeshwarar temple in Kumbakonam



A



B

Figure 5: A: The Zurna and B: Gypsy musicians performing the Zurna at a wedding in 1930's. Figures adapted from Wikimedia under the Creative Commons License

(ஆதி கும்பேஸ்வரர் கோவில் கும்பகோணம்) district, Tamil Nadu and at the Aathinathar Aalvar Temple (ஆதிநாதர் ஆழ்வார் கோவில்) in the Thoothukudi (தூத்துக்குடி) district in Tamil Nadu, India. Whilst such instruments are rarely used for actual performances, their existence is important in the teleological understanding of the modern day nathaswaram. (P Saravanan, *Dinamani* 22/10/2018). Both instruments are estimated to be several centuries old (they have not

been formally dated by carbon dating), weigh almost 6 times the weight of their modern and longer counterparts. The instruments are however significantly shorter (approximately 2 feet long) closely resembling the Shehnai described above (Figure 4A). These stone nathaswarams are less versatile than their wooden counterparts as they are harder to blow through and in general only 6 (of the usual 7) notes are playable in this instrument. As such some of the classical ragas such as



Karna- an ancient Persian musical instrument, made around 500 BC. Figure adapted from Wikimedia under the Creative Commons License.



Bari Nathaswaram

Thimiri Nathaswaram

The Thimiri (shorter and higher pitched) and Bari (longer and lower pitched) Nathaswarams – the final step in the evolution of the modern day nathaswaram. This development was first pioneered by T N Rajaratnam Pillai, along with the nathaswaram maker Ranganathan Achari from Narasingapettai, Kumbakonam, Tamil Nadu (See Part 1, Jaffna Monitor 15th December 2024)



‘Shankarabaranam’ (சங்கராபரணம்), ‘Karaharapriya’ (கரஹரப்ரியா) and Thodi (தோடி) are unplayable in the stone nathaswaram. (P Saravanan. *Dinamani* 22/10/2018). This limited versatility may have driven the local artists and nadaswaram makers to start using hardened wood instead of stone. This attempt to place the stone nathaswaram as a teleological precursor of the wood nathaswaram is admittedly a speculation of the author at this stage. The definitive proof can only come from future research that can provide more accurate dating of the few remaining stone nathaswarams.

The above sections provides the musical background, or the mileu within which the modern nathaswaram has evolved and thrived. It is hard if not impossible to suggest a direct linear connection between these different instruments. It is however clear, that the creativity and the ingenuity of the individual musicians and the desire/need to adapt their musical performances to suit the taste and preferences of their audience drove these changes. T N Rajaratnam Pillai’s efforts in lengthening the length of the middle portion of the ‘Thimri’ nathaswaram to produce the modern ‘Bari’ nathaswaram referred to in Part 1 (Figure 8) is the kind of creativity that have driven these adaptations (*Jaffna Monitor*, 15th December 2014). In this gradual transformation, both the performing artists and the makers of these instruments have played a critical role.

To be continued in the next edition.

The stone nathaswaram of Kumbakonam: In size and structure this has a close resemblance to the Shenhai, strongly suggesting a common origin or that one may have been derived from the other. For this reason, it is commonly believed (by several contemporary nathaswaram vidwans) that the nathaswaram may have developed through suitable adaptations to the shenhai (Image Adapted from The Hindu, 02/10/2017)



THE CHARIOT HANGAR

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

Translated by:
Eḷuttukkiṇiyavan
(எழுத்துக்கினியவன்)

“olaiyai vettuvathum kaththithānā! intha overseer solluvathum puththithānā? kaththarikkāy vettuvathum kaththithānā! inthak kangāniyār solluvathum puththithānā? pudalangay vettuvathum kaththithānā?”

[Is it the knife that cuts the leaf! Does this]
[overseer speak words of wisdom?]
[Is it the knife that cuts the eggplant? Does this]
[foreman speak words of wisdom?]
[Is it the knife that cuts the snake gourd?]

“Vayiravanathā... . . . Vayirava nathā... . . . get down dear.”

“olaiyai vettuvathum kaththithānā?”

“Listen to me child... .. get down ... mmm ... āah”

She kept shouting. The rice and gravy that she had been mixing on the plate stayed put.

Whether he was conscious of eating or not, he seemed to ignore his mother.

He was standing on top of the mortar. Holding a large handle-less sickle in his hand, he was swaying back and forth to the beat of his song.

Occasionally when the mortar wobbled, she was startled, afraid that he might topple over; but he kept on singing nonchalantly.

Whenever he felt like eating, he bent down and opened his mouth.

She was then supposed to feed him a ball of rice.

He would then resume his singing.

“olaiyai vettuvathum kaththithānā! intha overseer solluvathum puththithānā?”

Every day this ritual would last for at least three hours. But the mother never seemed to grow tired of it.

Unlike the others, the mother couldn't accept him as a complete retard. She was her only son; darling son; a dear son without even a blemish in his intellect.

But he did not appear to have developed the intellect to comprehend the differences among his mother, his house, and the world. He trusted that when he was hungry, his mother would feed him. He thought about nothing beyond this. He had neither need nor compulsion to think beyond that simple want.

He had the physique of a seventeen- or eighteen-year-old, with an unsightly protrusion for a belly; but his hairless face was that of a ten year old.

When he was still at school, she took him to school every morning. Then she waited the whole day until three in the afternoon, when school ended, to take him home, carefully covering his head with the free end of her sārī.

But his education only lasted from kindergarten to fourth grade.

His brain developed to the point where he could look at a picture and call out “R-O-O-S-T-E-R - Chicken!”. One day he said.

“Kandhaiyā vāththiyār [Kandhaiyā teacher]
kindhaiyā vāththiyār [Kindhaiyā teacher]
kaḷḷukku mēḷē [on top of a rock]
kundhaiya vāththiyār.” [squat yourself
down, Teacher.]

and ran away from the school.

With that perhaps Sellamma, too, was content with the completion of her son's schooling.

2

It was around one in the afternoon. I was going home for lunch.

“Here, *ammā*... ..”

“*edi* Sellammā... .. come over here; Can't you see that the teacher is passing by... .. tie my *vēṭṭi* will you?”

It was only then I noticed him. Fresh from a shower, he stood tall.

His mother must have gone inside to fetch a *vēṭṭi*.



“Teacher! Did the bell for the bread-break already ring... ..?”

I nodded in agreement.

His mind didn’t mature like his body did. Still, he had the sense to realize that he should not stand naked before the teacher.

Does he not have the ability to do anything on his own? My mind was struggling hard to separate the soul of Sellamma that was

intertwined with the body of Vayiravanāthan.

“*edi...* Sellamma... you devil, bring the *vēṭṭi*... Teacher is looking...”

I walked on slowly. I couldn’t dismiss him as a crazy person. I have seen with my own eyes when he acted with a rare sagacity that would astonish anyone. I also sensed a strange, rare magnetism tinged with fear that held one back from scolding him.

Nevertheless, I felt that some deep flaw trumped everything else.

3

Whenever a temple festival came along, his excitement knew no bounds. On New Year's Day, goddess *amman* will leave on a procession as is customary.

She would sit majestically on the red wooden horse perched on a wheeled cart, as the procession proceeded along the rough Nanthāvil lane.

That was a sight to behold!

By the time the deity returned to the temple, it would be two or three in the morning.

He would sit nonchalantly in a corner on the cart, feet dangling, holding up an oil torch.

One can envision the scene: an old silk *vēṭṭi* wrapped around his hip, held tightly in place by a red piece of cloth, his bare body generously dabbed with sandalwood paste, and his mouth frequently barking out commands.

As the cart stumbled over potholes, causing alarm among onlookers who feared that he might topple over, he would casually use his hip cloth to wipe the oil dripping down to



his elbow, and order people around without a care in the world: “Ah... Rathinaṇṇai... .. pour me some more oil.”

He would await the dawn with a frightening display of patience without catching even a wink.

When one saw him in this situation, one wondered if he didn't even have the awareness to be scared.

Not just temple festivals, he would show up uninvited to any wedding or funeral, too.

Someone would say “Vayiravanathā... arrange these betel leaves on the platter”. Without fatigue or displeasure, he would sit cross-legged and patiently arrange thousands

of betel leaves on platters. It would never occur to him to display any sign of discontent.

I would regard him in awe.

4

They had closed the school after midday for the chariot festival at the *Mañjavanappathi* temple. People thronged from near and far to see the giant chariot that was the pride of Kokuvil.

It was scorching, around two in the afternoon. As usual, the chariot had come to a halt amidst the multitudes of people, in the corner of the northern path around the temple.

I straightened my back to regard the chariot. It stood tall, like a giant motionless mountain, among the suffocating flood of tiny people. It had arrived there at ten in the morning but thereafter had refused to budge even an inch. The more people tried to pull the rope to cajole it to move, the more its wheels sank into the ground.

People milled around the chariot.

No one had any strength left in their bodies nor in their hearts.

Everyone was fasting for the festival, so hunger was gnawing at them.



“*Arōkarā!*”

“To *Mañjavanappathi* *Murukan!*”

“*Arōkarā!*”

As the countless people cheered on, the chariot would tantalize by appearing to budge a tiny bit, its brass bells jingling. It felt as if *Murukan* was laughing aloud at us ...

But the chariot did not budge.

All efforts were futile.

People started to whisper, “did someone commit some grave sin to anger God?”

Others pleaded at Murukaṇ’s feet, calling out his name.

Only then did I notice him. Amidst the thousands of jaded, exhausted people he stood apart, radiating a rare enthusiasm without any sign of tiredness.

That same old *vēṭṭi*, and the red cloth tied around it, and a chest daubed with sandalwood paste.

“*Arōkarā*... Mmm... To Maṇjavaṇappathi Murukaṇ..”

“*Arōkarā*”

“Mmmm... Kandhaiyā *aṇṇai*... give me a hand ... *Arōkarā*.”

He was pacing up and down, cheering people on. When everyone else was downcast, having lost all hope, he was still smiling.

Is he not tired? Does he not comprehend that a difficult job is indeed difficult?

The sun had started its descent. Whatever little hope that remained had started to fade.

One by one, people dropped the chariot rope and sat on their haunches.

No one had any ideas on how to remedy the situation. The chariot needs to reach its hangar.

Someone would touch the chariot rope, only to drop it the next moment, and go back to squatting.

Old Kathirkāmathāchchi who was carrying

a pot of burning camphor, went into a trance and squealed, “Murukaṇ demands a sacrifice, Murukaṇ demands a sacrifice.”

I glanced down. There were already three pumpkins smeared with vermilion powder and cut in half.

“Perhaps if someone fetches a tractor from Iṇuvil ... we can haul the chariot ...”

“What!”

The very thought struck everyone as disgusting and disgraceful.

How could one even contemplate getting a tractor to drag Murukaṇ’s chariot, which ought to be dragged by an outpouring of devotion?

“Kandhaiyā *aṇṇai* you take the wheel chock away, let’s give it one more try.”

“You madman... stand aside.”

Kandhaiyā *aṇṇai* felt a surge of anger.

“You are trying to teach me, are you?”

I examined Vayiravanāthan’s face closely. There was no sign of hatred whatsoever. It was as if he didn’t even hear Kandhaiyā *aṇṇai*’s harsh words.

He stood there wearing the same enthusiasm and smile.

People jostled to get a handhold on the chariot rope.

“*Arōkarā*”

“Teacher... mmm... give us a hand.”

It was said with a charm that precluded any possibility of disagreement. I wrapped my sālvaī around my waist and obeyed him.

“*Arōkarā*”

Eyes closed on their own. All of us focussed our hearts and expended every last ounce of energy to pull the chariot.

“To Murukaṇ”

“*Arōkarā*”

“To Mañjavanappathi Murukaṇ”

“*Arōkarā*”

The chariot relented and sped forward with sudden enthusiasm. At that moment, no one knew where we were heading.

Suddenly, something happened ...

Everyone dropped the chariot rope and sprinted in the opposite direction.

I did, too.

In the hot sand, he lay on his stomach in a pool of blood, bleeding from his mouth and nose. His right hand tightly clutched the sand.

When I crawled into the melee and looked over the heads of people with great difficulty, his left leg and arm were palpitating.

Thereafter he lay motionless.

4

I walk with my eyes fixated firmly on the tarred road surface.

People bustle this way and that.

“It seems the chariot has reached its hangar.”

My head, on its own, nods in agreement!

– Everything that begins a journey must reach its hangar, after all.

– But is reaching the hangar the important thing? How one reaches the destination is indeed important, is it not?

Kathirkamathāchchi’s deranged look flashes into my mind’s eye.

My mind weighs heavily.

– Teacher, why do you stand there staring. Give us a hand.

He stands there smiling. On his face, that same charm blended with fear. A charm that makes it impossible to decline the request.

“Teacher, who is it that died?”

I open my mouth to reply.

But my words stay pent up within my chest.

Someone behind me responds.

“It was some mad boy.”

I keep walking, lifting my vēṭṭi slightly to avoid tripping over it.

The gravel beneath my bare feet rekindles my pain.

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