

March 15, 2025

ISSN 3084-8962

Jaffna monitor

UNAFRAID AND UNBOWED

Rs. 750

**China's Ambassador
Describes Sri Lanka-
India-China Partnership
as His Dream,**

**Reveals \$7 Billion
Loss in Debt
Restructuring**

**"Sri Lanka Remains
Reluctant to Address
Missing Persons, Land
Returns, Accountability,
and Justice"**

- Nirupama Subramanian

**EXCLUSIVE
INTERVIEW**

▶▶ Monitor's Map

03

Editorial

07

China's Ambassador Describes Sri Lanka-India-China Partnership as His Dream, Reveals



13

Sumanthiran Eyes Parliament Seat? Sritharan Says, 'Keep Dreaming'

15

Two Out of Three NPP MPs in Jaffna Disillusioned with the Party?

16

Gajendrakumar's Sudden Moment of Political Clarity
TNPf Leader Calls for Tamil Parties to Unite

18

Sri Lanka Remains Reluctant to Address Missing Persons, Land Returns, Accountability, and Justice" - Nirupama Subramanian

26

YouTubers Galore: Jaffna's New 'Entrepreneurs' – Some Uplift the Poor, Others Just Lift!

28

Archchuna Talks the Talk—Louder Than Any Other Jaffna MP!

29

"Prabhakaran Wanted to Be the Sole Leader of Sri Lankan Tamils—That's Why He Killed My Father" - Amirthalingam's Son, Baheerathan

43

The Monk Who Walked for Peace—And Fell to Bullets, Remembered in Jaffna

46

Tamil Nationalists Cry About Being 'Second-Class Citizens,' But They Treat Tamil Dalits Worse Than That!" - Arun Siddharth

58

Jaffna-Trichy Flights Take Off After 50 Years

59

A Mother's Fight: Dilki's Journey after Viraj

62

"Nathaswara Osaiyile" An ancient art form that defines a people - part 4

71

Social Cohesion and the Challenge of Managing a Multi-Ethnic, Plural Sri Lanka

80

Story - One Way

Who's Blocking Jaffna's Economic Rise-and Why?



Arguably, apart from tourists, the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora constitutes the largest cohort of frequent visitors to Sri Lanka, with the majority tracing their ancestral lineage to Jaffna. Despite their profound historical, cultural, and emotional ties to the North—and the existence of an 'international' airport in Palaly—they remain deprived of the fundamental convenience of direct air connectivity to their homeland.

Established during World War II by the British Royal Air Force, Palaly Airport was initially a formidable military airfield before evolving into a vital civilian aviation hub post-war, ultimately attaining the status of Sri Lanka's second international airport. In 2019, bolstered by India's goodwill, the airport underwent a transformative upgrade and was rechristened Jaffna International Airport—envisioned as a pivotal gateway connecting the northern peninsula to the world.

Yet, India's commitment went beyond mere infrastructure enhancement. In a remarkable display of economic stewardship, India took an unprecedented step by offsetting the initial financial losses incurred by Indian Airlines on the Palaly-Chennai route. This strategic intervention was more than just a routine economic measure—it was a significant diplomatic gesture, underscoring the enduring solidarity that Sri Lankan Tamils should deeply recognize.

Despite this pivotal development, Palaly Airport remains limited to a single route-Chennai-while proposed expansions to Tiruchirappalli and Bengaluru remain in the pipeline. At present, its runway capacity restricts operations to small propeller-driven aircraft with a modest seating capacity of 75–80 passengers. This

technical constraint makes it logistically and economically unviable for airlines to extend operations beyond South India, as low passenger capacity inevitably leads to financial losses. And, of course, arbitrarily increasing ticket prices is not a feasible solution to offset these challenges.

While the addition of new destinations signals incremental progress, it falls woefully short of elevating the airport to its envisioned international stature. As a result, the "international" designation of Palaly Airport remains more of a rhetorical flourish than a tangible reality.

Even with its limited connectivity, the airport has already demonstrated significant economic value, attracting a substantial influx of Indian Tamil tourists. The historical temples of Sri Lanka's North and East, deeply intertwined with South Indian culture, continue to draw pilgrims from Tamil Nadu and beyond. The ancient Thirukoneswaram Temple in Trincomalee, for instance, regularly receives Telugu-speaking devotees from Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, as confirmed by the temple's management.

Moreover, for residents of the North, traveling to India from Jaffna has become increasingly convenient. Whether Hindus or Buddhists, many Sri Lankans seek spiritual fulfillment in India, home to their most revered pilgrimage sites—Kashi (Varanasi) for Hindus and Bodh Gaya for Buddhists.

However, in a stark paradox, the very demographic that Palaly Airport should serve as an economic lodestar—the vast Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora—remains effectively disenfranchised from its utility. The airport's anemic operational capacity renders it incapable of facilitating long-haul international flights, compelling this

crucial demographic to endure circuitous travel routes. What ought to have been an indispensable nexus of connectivity and economic revitalization remains a vestigial facility, its latent potential eviscerated by infrastructural atrophy.

The Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora, dispersed across more than 100 nations, boasts formidable concentrations in Canada, the UK, Australia, and Europe. In fact, empirical data suggests that the Tamil populace in Canada—particularly within the Greater Toronto Area—may eclipse Jaffna's current demography. Yet, despite their indelible ties to the North, these expatriates remain estranged from direct access to their homeland.

The crux of the issue is clear: Jaffna International Airport remains hamstrung by its inability to accommodate wide-body aircraft. Successive Sri Lankan administrations have displayed chronic short-sightedness regarding this infrastructural deficiency, repeatedly failing to implement the necessary expansions. As a result, what was once envisioned as a strategic international gateway has instead descended into irrelevance—an unrealized ambition, perpetually stalled by bureaucratic inertia.

A Frustrating Ordeal for the Diaspora

For thousands of Sri Lankan Tamils in the diaspora, returning home is not merely a trip—it is an emotional pilgrimage. They return to reconnect with aging parents, uplift extended families, invest in businesses, and contribute to charitable endeavors.

Yet, instead of a seamless homecoming, they are forced to land at Bandaranaike International Airport (BIA) in Katunayake—nearly 400 km away from Jaffna. After enduring long-haul flights exceeding 10

hours, their real ordeal begins on Sri Lankan soil. The journey from Colombo to Jaffna—another grueling 8 to 10 hours by road—is an exercise in patience and endurance. Many have lamented:

"It's not the long-haul flight from London or Toronto that drains us; it's the frustrating, energy-sapping, and poorly planned road journey from Colombo to Jaffna that truly exhausts us."

This unnecessary drain on time, money, and energy has led some diaspora members to avoid Jaffna altogether, opting instead to stay in Colombo and nearby cities. The prospect of subjecting their children to an exhausting road journey often discourages them from entirely visiting their ancestral homeland.

A Deliberate Act of Economic Sabotage?

Successive Sri Lankan governments have long engaged in sugar-coated rhetoric about reconciliation and development for Northern Tamils, yet their actions have consistently contradicted their words. While paying lip service to economic progress, they have systematically ensured that the North never reaches its full economic potential.

Every viable investment opportunity has been systematically obstructed—whether through bureaucratic inertia, policy impediments, or sheer neglect. Palaly Airport, which had the potential to evolve into a thriving international hub, remains paralyzed by inadequate infrastructure, while Kankesanthurai (KKS) Harbor exists in name alone, devoid of any substantial functional development.

Look at Colombo and the Western Province. Every government has aggressively expanded Bandaranaike International Airport,

transformed the Port of Colombo into a global transshipment hub, and invested billions into expressways leading to the South. What did Jaffna receive? A half-baked airport and an abandoned natural harbor.

A marine engineer friend once shared an eye-opening reality with me—one that, in many ways, explains why Sri Lanka has struggled economically. KKS Port—a large, strategically located harbor just 30 km from Indian ports like Rameswaram and Nagapattinam—remains grossly underutilized. Instead of facilitating direct trade, goods from India must first be shipped to Colombo—nearly 400 km away—only to be transported back to Jaffna by road, incurring unnecessary costs and logistical delays.

The Sri Lankan government must prioritize a phased expansion of Palaly Airport, starting with runway extension to accommodate mid-range international flights. Given Sri Lanka's economic constraints, a Public-Private Partnership (PPP) model could be the most viable approach, allowing private investors—including diaspora business leaders—to contribute capital in exchange for long-term operational stakes.

Moreover, India has consistently expressed willingness to fund infrastructure development in the North—Sri Lanka must leverage this commitment through transparent agreements ensuring mutual benefit. Additionally, the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora, with its financial strength, should be given structured opportunities to invest in aviation and trade infrastructure through diaspora bonds or targeted investment schemes.

Sri Lanka need not look far for inspiration—India has successfully transformed several regional airports into thriving international

hubs through strategic investment and public-private partnerships (PPP). A prime example is Tiruchirappalli International Airport (Trichy), once a modest regional facility that now operates as a key gateway for South Indian travelers with direct flights to Southeast Asia and the Middle East.

The Indian government's UDAN (Ude Desh Ka Aam Nagrik) initiative, aimed at enhancing regional connectivity, has revitalized dozens of smaller airports by expanding runways, incentivizing airlines, and securing private investment. Today, even cities with smaller populations, like Coimbatore and Madurai, boast international flight networks—a model that could be replicated in Jaffna with the right policy interventions.

A Turning Point: NPP Must Break This Cycle

The cycle of political betrayal must be dismantled, and the National People's Power (NPP) government now stands at a defining crossroads. It must prove itself as a true departure from the status quo. Unlike previous regimes that alienated the North and East, the people of these regions—including Jaffna—have placed historic trust in the NPP, electing three out of six MPs from the district. For decades, successive governments dismissed their obligations with the unspoken justification: “They didn't vote for us.” That feeble excuse has now been unequivocally invalidated.

Jaffna—once the epicenter of separatist tensions in Sri Lanka's political discourse—has turned a new page. By voting for the NPP, the people have embraced a vision of a unified Sri Lanka, a conscious departure from past divisions. Now, the onus lies on the NPP government to honor this trust through

tangible economic revitalization, not mere rhetoric.

Anura Kumara Disanayake, a leader widely revered among Tamils as one of their own, shoulders an unequivocal duty to ensure the advancement of Tamil-majority regions. Can an economy flourish when its primary gateway to the world remains a skeletal airport, incapable of handling even mid-range international flights? Can a region unlock its commercial potential when its harbor remains a dilapidated relic of neglect?

If the NPP fails to develop Jaffna Airport and KKS Harbor, it will shatter the credibility of its own revolutionary promise, proving itself no different from its predecessors—another administration complicit in the same systemic marginalization that has throttled Jaffna's progress for generations. The people have moved forward, rejecting stagnation and cynicism. Now, the government must rise to the occasion—or expose itself as yet another steward of hollow pledges and deferred aspirations.

Jaffna's immense potential is undeniable, yet the real test lies ahead—will the government seize this historic moment or doom yet another generation to the crushing weight of state-engineered neglect? The path forward is crystal clear—bold action or outright betrayal. Will they finally deliver on their promises, or will they stab in the back the very people who, for the first time in history, placed their trust in them?

Warm regards,

கணியன் பூங்குன்றன்
Kaniyan Pungundran
Editor-in-Chief,
Jaffna Monitor

China's Ambassador Describes Sri Lanka-India-China Partnership as His Dream, Reveals \$7 Billion Loss in Debt Restructuring



Qi Zhenhong



BY:

Our Special Correspondent

Emulating Martin Luther King Jr.'s iconic “I Have a Dream” speech, China’s Ambassador to Sri Lanka, Qi Zhenhong, outlined his vision for a collaborative initiative between Sri Lanka, India, and China, emphasizing that such a partnership is essential for regional progress. In a notable statement, he declared, “India is not an enemy nation to China. My dream is for Sri Lanka, India, and China to come together and advance a joint initiative in South Asia.”

He urged observers not to focus solely on the confrontation between China and India, emphasizing that both nations are major powers, neighboring countries, and ancient civilizations. At the same time, they are emerging markets with a shared mission—development.

—高质量发展与中斯命运共同体媒体研讨会

High Quality Development

China-Sri Lanka Community with a Shared Future



中华人民共和国驻斯里兰卡民主社会主义共和国大使馆

Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka



Chinese Ambassador Qi Zhenhong engaging with the press in Colombo

"I believe that relations between China and India will continue to improve over time. As Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi once said, China and India should strive for harmony by maintaining balance rather than seeking conflict. I have a dream that, in the future, China, India, and Sri Lanka will collaborate on a joint project or venture," he said during an interaction with select media representatives at the Chinese Embassy in Colombo.

The discussion, attended by media representatives, including Jaffna Monitor, covered key aspects of China's policy approach. The ambassador elaborated on China's Two Sessions—an annual political

gathering comprising the National People's Congress (NPC) and the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC). These sessions set the country's legislative and economic agenda for the year, shaping both domestic and foreign policies. The briefing also included insights into the Government Work Report, China's economic prospects, and the country's evolving diplomatic strategy.

China Reveals \$7 Billion Loss in Sri Lanka's Debt Restructuring

Speaking at the media briefing, Ambassador Qi revealed that China's Export-Import Bank (Exim Bank) has incurred a \$7 billion loss due to Sri Lanka's foreign debt restructuring.

He noted that Although China is not a member of the Official Creditor Committee (OCC), China was the first country to sign a debt restructuring agreement with Sri Lanka, setting a precedent for other creditors. Expressing disappointment, he remarked, "Nobody in Sri Lanka talks about it, because we don't do propaganda."

The ambassador emphasized that China remains committed to supporting Sri Lanka's economic stability. "Now, we look forward to seeing other official creditors finalize their agreements with Sri Lanka so that the country can recover and move toward financial stability as soon as possible," he stated.

China Responds to Tamil MP's Remarks on Alleged Interference in Northern Waters

When asked about Tamil MP Selvam Adaikalanathan's recent statement in Parliament—where he claimed "I ask, in what capacity is China engaging with our fishermen in the North today? China's agenda has always been to seize land and exploit resources. We will not allow any form of intervention in the North through such means. No country other than India will be permitted to interfere in the North."—the Chinese Embassy in Colombo responded with a firm denial.

Deputy Chief of Mission Zhu Yanwei who accompanied the Chinese ambassador in the press interaction, first asked whether the statement had been made by an Indian MP or a Sri Lankan Tamil MP, given its nature. Upon being informed that it was made by a Sri Lankan Tamil MP, he responded: "China has no strategic interest in Sri Lanka's land or maritime territories. Our engagement with Sri Lanka is for the benefit of all its people, including those in the Northern and Eastern

provinces. We do not differentiate between Tamils, Sinhalese, or Muslims. The Chinese Embassy here is committed to working with everyone in this country in all sectors—be it development, agriculture, or any other area. Our relationship with Sri Lanka dates back to prehistoric times, and China's involvement is based on assisting its people, not geopolitical ambitions. Sri Lanka's maritime boundaries belong solely to Sri Lanka, and China has no intention of creating conflicts between Sri Lanka and India."

He also emphasized that MP Adaikalanathan's statement was a personal opinion and should be respected as freedom of speech.

When asked about the perception among Northern communities regarding China's increasing presence in the region—particularly concerns raised in some Tamil newspapers that China might be "fishing in troubled waters" in relation to the Sri Lankan Tamil and Indian fishermen issue—Zhu Yanwei dismissed such claims.

"Sri Lanka's land and waters belong to its people. Any disputes Sri Lanka has with its neighbors should be resolved independently by the governments involved, without interference from third parties.

China and India are each other's largest neighbors, and we firmly believe they should be partners, supporting each other's success. A cooperative pas de deux between the dragon and the elephant is the only viable path for China and India.

As for Sri Lanka, we trust in the country's wisdom and political acumen to manage its relations with its neighbors," he stated.



China's Stance on the Sri Lanka-India Fishermen Issue

When Jaffna Monitor asked whether China's acknowledgment of Sri Lanka's sovereignty over its maritime waters implied support for Sri Lankan Tamil fishermen in the Sri Lanka-India fisheries dispute, Zhu responded diplomatically, avoiding taking sides: "China stands with all its friends, including both India and Sri Lanka. We hope this issue can be resolved peacefully through mutual understanding and agreement between the two nations."

Continuing his discussion with the press, China's Ambassador to Sri Lanka, Qi Zhenhong, described President Anura Kumara Dissanayake's recent visit to China as highly productive, emphasizing that the relationship

between the two nations has now entered a new phase, characterized as a "community with a shared future."

"At the beginning of this year, the President of Sri Lanka undertook a highly successful state visit to China. Our bilateral relationship has now entered a new stage, defined as a 'community with a shared future.' During this visit, 15 Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) were signed," Ambassador Qi stated.

He underscored that such agreements would not have been possible without a strong foundation of mutual understanding between the two countries. "Both sides are now working closely to implement these agreements, delivering on the important consensus reached by our two leaders and bringing tangible benefits to our peoples," he added.

China's Support for Sri Lanka's Development

Providing an example of ongoing cooperation, the ambassador stated that the Chinese government will donate school uniforms to Sri Lankan students in 2026. A Chinese delegation of experts will visit Sri Lanka to oversee the initiative, which will benefit a larger number of students than in previous years, including Buddhist monastic students.

Additionally, he revealed that China is set to donate and construct a National Exhibition Center in Colombo's Port City, aimed at enhancing Sri Lanka's global engagement.

The ambassador also highlighted the importance of personnel training and exchange programs, reinforcing long-term development cooperation between the two nations.

\$3.7 Billion Sinopec Investment & Hambantota Oil Refinery

Addressing China's investment in Hambantota, the ambassador highlighted the development of South Asia's largest oil refinery in the region—a project backed by Sinopec, a leading Chinese oil and gas company—with an investment of \$3.7 billion.

The ambassador stated, "This initiative is expected to generate over 15,000 jobs for Sri Lankans and significantly contribute to the country's economic recovery."

When asked about concerns regarding the potential impact on local water resources, he assured the media that China has taken environmental considerations seriously. "Water conservation measures are being implemented to mitigate long-term consequences," he stated.

He further emphasized that Sinopec's investment will play a crucial role in helping Sri Lanka navigate its economic crisis, foster industrialization, increase government revenue, and enhance job creation.

Revival of Stalled Chinese Projects in Sri Lanka

The ambassador also addressed concerns over delayed Chinese-funded projects in Sri Lanka, stating that while some projects have been halted due to economic challenges, once debt restructuring is fully settled, China will reassess and proceed with previously delayed initiatives.

To ensure the success of these bilateral projects, he stressed the need for earnest and constructive discussions between Sri Lanka and China, aiming for win-win cooperation that benefits both nations.

China's Position on U.S. and Russia

When asked about U.S.-Russia relations, he asserted that China and Russia maintain a non-aligned stance, striving to avoid geopolitical conflicts. He also reaffirmed that China's historical ties with Russia remain strong and are unlikely to change. "A mature, resilient, and stable China-Russia relationship will not be swayed by any turn of events, nor will it be subjected to interference by any third party," he stated.

When asked about the deterioration of China-U.S. relations following Donald Trump's assumption of office as U.S. President, he emphasized, "China and the U.S. must seek peaceful coexistence on this planet."

He reiterated China's commitment to maintaining stable bilateral relations with the U.S. However, he noted that China continues

to face economic, technological, and military pressures from the U.S. Despite Washington's aggressive tactics, he asserted that China is prepared to counter any challenge to its national interests.

"We are ready to go to any extent and fight the U.S. if China is treated unfairly," he warned.

Regarding U.S. tariffs, he stated, "China will definitely take countermeasures in response to arbitrary pressure.

China Denies Allegations of Interference in Jaffna University Appointment

Regarding the official letter allegedly issued by the Chinese Embassy, which was purportedly addressed to the President of Sri Lanka and the Education Minister in support of Professor Balasundarampillai's candidacy for the Vice Chancellor position at Jaffna University, Chinese officials have strongly denied its authenticity.

The letter, widely circulated on social media, contained a passage stating:

"In light of his vast experience, integrity, and unwavering commitment to the advancement of higher education in Sri Lanka, we believe that Emeritus Professor Balasundarampillai would be an ideal candidate for the position of Chancellor of the University of Jaffna. His appointment would not only bring immense prestige to the university but also inspire future generations of scholars in the region. The Embassy of the People's Republic of China respectfully requests Your Excellency to give favorable consideration to the appointment of Emeritus Professor P. Balasundarampillai as the Chancellor of the University of Jaffna."

The circulation of this letter has fueled claims that foreign countries are interfering in Sri Lanka's internal affairs. However, when Jaffna Monitor inquired about the matter, Chinese officials vehemently dismissed the letter as an outright fake—so poorly written that it was evident the author had no understanding of how an embassy drafts official correspondence, an official stated to Jaffna Monitor.

"We have officially lodged a complaint with Sri Lanka's Foreign Ministry regarding this matter," a Chinese official told Jaffna Monitor. "This is a sinister attempt to portray China as meddling in Sri Lanka's internal affairs, particularly in Jaffna, in an effort to turn the people of Jaffna against us. We are aware that powerful individuals are behind this fabrication, but we will ensure that they do not succeed."

Monitoring India from Jaffna? 'That's a Bad Joke!' Says China

After the press meet, in a casual conversation, Jaffna Monitor asked an influential Chinese diplomat about the speculation that China's growing presence in the North was aimed at monitoring India.

Chuckling at the suggestion, he quipped, "That's a bad joke! As you know, we are technologically advanced in every aspect. We have thousands of satellites—if we wanted to monitor India, we could do it while sitting comfortably in a room. We wouldn't need to take a long trip to Jaffna just for that!" he added, "Trust me, we're here for development, not espionage.

What specific development projects China has planned for the North—and how they will take shape—remains to be seen.

Sumanthiran Eyes Parliament Seat? Sritharan Says, ‘Keep Dreaming’



M.A. Sumanthiran (left) and S. Sritharan (right) in a rare cordial conversation.

In what could be seen as a strategic move— or just another dramatic attempt to slip back into Parliament—ITAK General Secretary and Jaffna District MP M.A. Sumanthiran has hinted at an easy return to the big house. He suggested that if his longtime rival, ITAK Jaffna District MP S. Sritharan, steps down to contest for the Chief Minister

post in the upcoming Northern Provincial Council election, he (Sumanthiran) would automatically reclaim a seat in Parliament as the next highest preferential vote holder from the party in the 2024 General Election.

However, Sritharan was quick to rain on that parade. Speaking to the media, he



P. Sathiyalingam – Doctor by day (part-time), Sumanthiran loyalist full-time!

firmly dismissed the speculation, making it abundantly clear that he has absolutely no intention of resigning. “Not today, not tomorrow, not in the foreseeable future,” he all but declared, leaving Sumanthiran’s “shortcut” to Parliament looking more like a dead-end.

Sumanthiran made these remarks during a special interview with a private television channel in Colombo. Addressing the possibility of returning to Parliament, he reiterated his long-standing position that entering through the National List is improper for him. “In the Jaffna electoral district, I secured the second-highest number of preferential votes within our party. Since we won only one seat, I was unable to enter Parliament. If Sritharan, who received the highest votes, resigns for any reason, I would automatically take his place as per the election system. There is no wrongdoing in that,” he stated.

Sources reveal that when M.A. Sumanthiran lost his parliamentary seat in the last general election, there were behind-the-scenes efforts to persuade S. Sritharan to step down and re-enter Parliament via the National

List—effectively handing Sumanthiran a smooth return to the House. Adding spice to the drama, a certain morning and evening newspaper—allegedly bankrolled by Sumanthiran—enthusiastically wrote about this theory, perhaps hoping to manifest it into reality.

But Sritharan wasn’t having any of it. He outright rejected the idea, dismissing it as a “funny joke.” And why wouldn’t he? Before the election, Sumanthiran had emphatically declared that he would never use the National List as a backdoor into Parliament. Yet, in a move that raised more than a few eyebrows, he later appointed his most die-hard loyalist—Dr. P. Sathiyalingam, then ITAK’s secretary—to the National List. Then, in what felt like a well-rehearsed exchange, just months after the appointment, Sumanthiran smoothly reclaimed the ITAK General Secretary post from him.

An ITAK insider, speaking to Jaffna Monitor, couldn't resist a cheeky comparison, quipping that the whole episode was reminiscent of legendary comedian Vadivelu’s classic joke: “You keep my akka, I’ll keep your bakery!”

Two Out of Three NPP MPs in Jaffna Disillusioned with the Party?



Karunanathan Ilankumaran



Dr. S. Bavananda Rajah



Rajeevan Jeyachandramoorthy

Credible sources have told Jaffna Monitor that two out of the three NPP MPs elected from the Jaffna electoral district are feeling increasingly frustrated with their party.

In the last election, the NPP secured three seats in Jaffna: Karunanathan Ilankumaran, a heavyweight in the CEB trade union and a longtime JVP activist; Dr. S. Bavananda Rajah, the former Deputy Director of the Teaching Hospital; and Rajeevan Jeyachandramoorthy, a former school principal turned politician.

Additionally, Ramalingam Chandrasekar, the NPP's Jaffna district chief organizer and a veteran JVP figure from Nuwara Eliya, entered Parliament through the national list and was rewarded with the Minister of Fisheries portfolio.

Now, here's where things get murky. While it is expected that a JVP stalwart like Chandrasekar would receive his due, sources claim that the

ruling camp is showering all its attention on Karunanathan Ilankumaran, a JVP activist, while systematically sidelining and ignoring the other two MPs, who have no direct ties to the JVP. It's as if Bavananda Rajah and Jeyachandramoorthy have been reduced to mere political wallpaper—technically present, yet completely overlooked.

JVP's Masterstroke or a Political Monopoly?

Although the NPP presents itself as a coalition, the JVP remains its undisputed backbone. Critics have long accused the JVP of using the NPP as a cosmetic rebrand to erase its violent past while ensuring that only JVP members climb the political ladder. The situation in Jaffna seems to confirm this suspicion, with non-JVP MPs being left in the cold while their counterparts enjoy the limelight.

Continued on page 10

Gajendrakumar's Sudden Moment of Political Clarity TNPf Leader Calls for Tamil Parties to Unite

In what can only be described as the rarest of rare moments of making political sense, Jaffna MP and Tamil National People's Front (TNPf) leader Gajendrakumar Ponnambalam has sounded the alarm for Tamil political parties in Sri Lanka's north and east. Speaking to *The Hindu*, he declared that Tamil parties have no choice but to consolidate their presence in Parliament if they wish to effectively challenge the Anura Kumara Disanayake-led government and assert the rights of the Tamil people.

"The Tamil people wanted to teach all traditional Tamil nationalist parties, including us, a lesson... our vote share nearly halved. If we don't pick up the pieces and see the writing on the wall, the next election will be disastrous... we must work together in Parliament," Ponnambalam admitted, perhaps signaling a long-overdue political reality check.



Tamil Politics: A Self-Inflicted Wound?

Analyzing the brutal electoral performance of Tamil parties in the 2024 elections, Ponnambalam pinned the blame on what he called an "erosion" of Tamil nationalist politics.

"From 2010, after the civil war ended, and particularly after 2015, there has been a gap between the Tamil nationalist assurances given to our people during elections and what the parties actually practiced," he noted.

In simpler terms, Tamil politicians promised the moon but barely delivered a streetlight.

And who does he hold responsible for this downfall? None other than the Tamil National Alliance (TNA), once the biggest political force among Tamils. According to Ponnambalam, the TNA "got used" by the

Maithripala Sirisena-Ranil Wickremesinghe administration (2015-2019), implying that the alliance was more comfortable playing along with Colombo's political chessboard than actually pushing for Tamil aspirations.

JVP's Surprising Evolution—Ponnambalam Takes Note

In a rather unexpected twist, Ponnambalam admitted that the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP)—the leftist powerhouse of the ruling National People's Power (NPP)—has undergone a notable transformation since 2019.

“President Dissanayake rightly says racism has been a major problem in our country and has vowed to wipe it out. The rhetoric is welcome, but we need to see qualitative change in action,” he said, adding that mere words won't erase decades of systemic discrimination.

He argued that deep-rooted racism in Sri Lanka "won't just disappear" without fundamental structural changes. Still

advocating for federalism, he stated: “The unitary state must go. The government must devolve power, be transparent with all Sri Lankans in the process, and assure them that federalism is not the same as separatism.”

TNPF's 'Rain of Labels'—A Hurdle to Political Unity?

However, political observers argue that before expecting other parties to work with the TNPF, Gajendrakumar Ponnambalam must first put his own house in order. Since the demise of the LTTE, it appears that the TNPF has taken on the role of "sole authority" in deciding who is a traitor and who is a martyr. According to critics, its spokespersons and supporters have been distributing these labels like temple prasadam—generously and without hesitation.

“If Ponnambalam truly wants Tamil parties to unite, he needs to put an end to this nonsense,” one analyst remarked. “How can he expect to engage with people he and his party have already branded as traitors?” he questioned.

Continuation from page 8

The irony of the situation is hard to miss. Dr. Bavananda Rajah, a well-respected doctor who previously worked at a prestigious private hospital, was earning a comfortable six-figure salary before entering politics. Rajeevan Jeyachandramoorthy, in addition to his government salary, ran a thriving English tuition center that provided him with a steady income. But those days of financial security are now a distant memory. While Sri Lankan MPs receive a generous salary and allowances, sources claim that NPP MPs are allowed to keep only LKR 80,000 per month, with the rest going to the party.

For professionals who were accustomed to significantly higher earnings, this drastic pay cut has been a bitter pill to swallow. One of the frustrated MPs reportedly confided in our source: “நான் பார்த்தது விசர் வேலை. நான் இதுக்கு வந்திருக்க கூடாது.” (“I made a foolish mistake. I shouldn't have gotten into this.”)

At this rate, don't be surprised if these MPs start offering private tuition on the side, discreetly consulting at hospitals, or, worse—considering resignation out of sheer frustration. After all, ideological commitment is one thing, but no one enjoys going broke in the process, a source confided to Jaffna Monitor.

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

Sri Lanka Remains Reluctant to Address Missing Persons, Land Returns, Accountability, and Justice"

Nirupama Subramanian in an

EXCLUSIVE
INTERVIEW



BY:

கணியன் பூங்குன்றன்
Kaniyan Pungundran



Nirupama Subramanian

Few journalists have navigated the turbulent landscape of South Asia with the depth and nuance of Nirupama Subramanian. A veteran reporter, foreign correspondent, and editor, she has spent over three decades chronicling wars, political upheavals, and human stories with fearless dedication. From the battle-scarred villages of Sri Lanka's civil war to the tense streets of Pakistan under military rule and the shifting power dynamics across India and its neighbors, her reporting has illuminated some of South Asia's most complex conflicts.

As *The Hindu's* correspondent in Sri Lanka (1995–2002), she covered the height of the war between the Sri Lankan state and the LTTE, capturing the struggles of civilians caught in the crossfire. Her book, *Sri Lanka: Voices from a War Zone*, remains a seminal work. In Pakistan (2006–2010), she reported on the rise of extremism, military rule, and the assassination of Benazir Bhutto—often working under surveillance. Her fearless dispatches earned her the Prem Bhatia Award (2008) for Excellence in Political Reporting and the Chameli Devi Jain Award (2009) for Outstanding Women Journalists.

Beyond conflict reporting, Subramanian has held senior editorial roles at *The Hindu* and *The Indian Express*, shaping coverage on India's national security, foreign policy, and the wider South Asian region. She expanded her investigative lens into true crime with *Murder on the Menu*, a gripping account of the Saravana Bhavan murder case. A Nieman Fellow at Harvard, she has also contributed to Track II diplomacy efforts, fostering dialogue between India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka.

With an unparalleled career spanning war zones, political capitals, and editorial boardrooms, Nirupama Subramanian remains one of the foremost voices on South Asia

today. Her insights are shaped by years on the ground—listening to people, questioning power, and telling stories that matter.

This is *Jaffna Monitor's* exclusive interview with her.

How do you view the new government in Sri Lanka led by Anura Kumara Dissanayake? As someone who has extensively covered Sri Lanka, do you believe they are willing to share power with the Tamils or offer any form of settlement that could help heal the wounds of the three-decade-long civil war?

The election of AKD and the JVP marks a decisive break from the past, signaling a rejection of the old ruling elites. However, so far, his government has not made any major departures from previous governance practices. The budget revealed the constraints within which the government must operate, despite the election promise of renegotiating IMF conditionalities. They say election promises are made in poetry, but governance is in prose. AKD is following this pattern—he has no silver bullet.

In Northern and Eastern Sri Lanka, where the JVP/NPP made history by winning a plurality of seats—the first for a non-Tamil party—expectations are high. So far, there have been no policy statements on Tamil issues, perhaps due to the government's preoccupation with the budget and economic concerns. However, the JVP cannot avoid this issue indefinitely.

There has been speculation about a new constitution, and whether or not it will include the 13th Amendment. JVP, which opposed it with violence at the time it was introduced as a result

of the Indian intervention, has not been very clear about its current positioning on the issue. A small clue was its absence in the India-Sri Lanka joint statement when AKD visited Delhi.

I am told it was omitted at the behest of the visiting side. The Amendment is the only instance in which the Sri Lankan polity has addressed Tamil political aspirations constitutionally. Its importance to India-Sri Lanka relations cannot be underestimated. You may have noted that Prime Minister Modi mentioned it in the press conference with President Dissanayake without using the words “13th Amendment.” His exact words were: “We hope that the Sri Lankan government shall fulfil the aspirations of the Tamil people and that they shall fulfil their commitment towards fully implementing the Constitution of Sri Lanka and conducting the Provincial Council Elections.” Provincial Councils are a provision of the 13th Amendment.

Tamils always looked to India or the UN to put pressure on the Sri Lankan government. In the new world order, where international institutions such as the UN may no longer carry the same weight as they once did—particularly after their inability to stop Israel's genocidal war in Gaza— it is up to the government to act responsibly. Hopefully, the JVP will break away from its own past and do what is right.

The Adani Group has withdrawn from the wind power projects in Mannar, and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently met with former Sri Lankan President Ranil Wickremesinghe in India. Do you see this as a sign of India's dissatisfaction with the new Sri Lankan government?



Nirupama Subramaniyan (left) with Mangala Samaraweera, then Cabinet Spokesperson (middle), and journalist Susannah (Suzy) Price of the BBC in 2000.



Nirupama Subramanian speaking with Jaffna University students in Jaffna, 2000.

I don't know if that was a signal from Delhi to the AKD government, but that is certainly how Mr Wickremesinghe would like it to be interpreted in Sri Lanka.

You've extensively covered South Asia, particularly conflict zones. What do you see as the biggest challenge in reporting from areas deeply affected by political unrest and war?

The biggest challenge is maintaining the trust of readers and viewers by ensuring that you are not biased toward one side or against the other. Being objective is not merely about getting a quote from one side and another from the other. Objectivity means presenting facts without getting lost in misinformation and “counter” facts. Identifying the real facts is the hardest task for a journalist in an age where people ask, “Whose truth?” Even a

venerable institution like the BBC is struggling to uphold this standard and maintain its reputation in its coverage of the Israeli invasion of Gaza.

Experts have suggested that India has lost some of its traditional allies in the region, with some attributing this to diplomatic missteps. How do you assess the current state of India's relations with its neighboring countries in the evolving geopolitical landscape? In your view, what is the trajectory of these relationships, and how are they progressing?

Leaving aside Pakistan which is a different case, India has never had an easy relationship with its neighbors. With Sri Lanka, the first major issue was Colombo's disenfranchisement



Nirupama Subramanian speaking with displaced people in Jaffna, 2000

of the Malaiha Tamils, followed by the anti-Tamil riots and Tamil militancy in the north and India's involvement in it.

With Nepal—the only country in the region with an open border with India—relations have fluctuated. You may recall that India imposed a blockade on Nepal in the 1980s during Rajiv Gandhi's tenure as prime minister. It was a terrible mistake, and history repeated itself in 2015-2016, just months after Modi took office and declared a Neighbourhood First policy.

With Bangladesh, safe havens for militant groups active in India's northeast were a constant concern until Sheikh Hasina's election in 2008. Her responsiveness to Indian security concerns was one of the key reasons Delhi maintained good relations with her.

Over the past two decades, China's growing

competition with India for regional influence has added another layer of complexity to these dynamics.

We have to understand how India's rise and self-perception as a regional power began with its intervention in East Pakistan and the creation of Bangladesh—a turning point for India and the region. At this time, the excessive securitization of relations means that India engages primarily with those running the government in neighbouring countries, with little regard for what the people of that country think of their leaders. This is one reason why India is disliked in Bangladesh.

However, India's security remains a priority. It has to contend with two hostile nations, China and Pakistan, both of which covet Indian territory. India has fought four wars against Pakistan and one against China, with some situations in the last decade bringing it close to



From left to right: V. Anandasangaree (then TULF President), Nirupama Subramaniyan, Mavai Senathirajah, and Nadarajah Raviraj at the TULF office in Jaffna.

another. These tensions are real and unlikely to disappear.

Furthermore, all said and done, India is a large country surrounded by smaller nations. While these countries seek economic connectivity with India, they also do not want to be overwhelmed by its influence. Naturally, they leverage their relations with China to keep India from getting too confident.

You have extensively written about and

covered the Sri Lankan civil war. In your view, what were the key factors that contributed to the defeat of the LTTE?

Conflicts don't arise out of thin air. The Sinhalese polity was short-sighted in its decision to disenfranchise the Malaiha Tamils and in enacting the Sinhala Only Act. The Tamil side made the mistake of believing that India would help them “do another Bangladesh” in Sri Lanka. The LTTE, in turn,

made the mistake of thinking it could force separation solely through war, to the exclusion of everything else. It ignored many political opportunities that its war had created—in 1987, in 1994, and in 2002. The LTTE also lost the goodwill of Tamils in India, even in Tamil Nadu, when it assassinated Rajiv Gandhi.

With your focus on Sri Lanka, how do you assess the post-war progress in terms of reconciliation and development? What areas do you think still need significant attention?

I don't think the progress has matched anyone's expectations. Sri Lanka had to be dragged to the task of reconciliation and remains reluctant to address questions of missing persons, return of land, accountability, and justice. After the war ended, the government was more interested in projecting its military victory to consolidate itself politically.

How do you assess the current political landscape of Tamil parties in the Northern and Eastern provinces? In your opinion, are they taking the right approach in addressing the rights and aspirations of the Tamil community?

Since the war ended in 2009, Tamil parties have struggled to adapt to the new reality—their politics had to find a post-war platform. What is their place in national politics? How do they find relevance in Colombo? What is the central Tamil issue today?

These questions seem to haunt Tamil politicians. Their uncertainty, compounded by the interventions of the Tamil diaspora, has

alienated the Tamil people—especially the new generation that has now come of political age. The LTTE had been the self-appointed leader of the Tamil community, and willingly or unwillingly, the people accepted that.

With the LTTE no longer in the picture, people are searching for leadership. The economic crisis hit Tamil areas as hard, if not harder, than the south. It is unclear how much support Tamil politicians extended to the people in the north and east—how much solidarity they showed with those in Jaffna and Mannar—but what is certain is that some individuals, including students, expressed solidarity with the aragalaya.

Should Tamil parties have read the mood at the time instead of dismissing the aragalaya as a southern phenomenon? I don't presume to have the answers. Tamil political parties have endured immense challenges—targeted by the LTTE on one side and used and discarded by national political parties on the other. At times, they risked their lives to assert that the LTTE could not claim exclusive leadership of the Tamil people. Now, they are being forced to rethink their approach, and that is not necessarily a bad thing.

What challenges did you face from the Sri Lankan government, military, and the LTTE while reporting during the war years?

I faced some but it was not as horrific or as nightmarish as what journalists covering today's conflicts faced. Those problems happened on one day and vanished the next, and to dwell on them serves no purpose now.

How do you reflect on the JVP uprising and the violence that occurred during

that period? How did it compare to the conflict involving the LTTE?

Both challenged the state and were put down brutally by the state, though it took longer with the LTTE because of the diplomatic costs.

In your view, was the LTTE war always destined to end in their defeat, or were there moments when you believed a different outcome was possible?

I never thought the LTTE would win the war. But I did not believe they would be routed to non-existence. I believed the war might produce a political opening, as it had done previously, either through a stalemate or the self-restraint of the government, and that a people exhausted by the decades of fighting and dislocation might have better agency to compel the myopic leader of the LTTE to accept that opening and work with it.

Tamil Nadu's leaders, over time, have

had significant connections with the LTTE and the Sri Lankan Tamil struggle. How do you think these relationships shaped the trajectory of the conflict in Sri Lanka?

The patronage of the Tamil parties in TN was based on selfish political reasons. It did enormous harm to the Tamil people's cause in Sri Lanka.

You spent four years in Pakistan, an enemy country of India. What is your understanding of the country and its people? Did you feel safe while living there?

I never felt unsafe living in Pakistan. I made many friends, whose friendships I still cherish today. While I sensed the hostility of the Pakistani state toward my presence, the people I met were always warm, hospitable, and friendly.

Announcement



The interview with LTTE co-founder Ragavan will be published in the next issue due to unforeseen circumstances.

YouTubers Galore: Jaffna's New 'Entrepreneurs' – Some Uplift the Poor, Others Just Lift!

Jaffna residents are facing a new kind of nuisance. Much like legendary comedian Goundamani's lament in Mannan, where he quipped, "நாட்டுல இந்த தொழிலதிபர்கள் தொல்லை தாங்கமுடியலப்பா! புண்ணாக்கு விக்கிறவன், குண்டுசி விக்கிறவன் எல்லாம் தொழிலதிபராம்!" ("This country is unbearable with these so-called businessmen! Even a guy selling cattle feed and another selling gunny bags now claim to be entrepreneurs!")—today, Jaffna folks are echoing a similar sentiment: "This country is unbearable with these YouTubers!"

A source jokingly remarked, "If you trip and fall in Jaffna, chances are you'll be 'Touch and Lift'-ed by a YouTuber before you even hit the ground." The region has witnessed an explosion of self-proclaimed content creators, where owning a smartphone seems to be the only qualification needed to become a "YouTube social worker."

Many of these YouTubers portray themselves as champions of the downtrodden, producing half-baked, tear-jerking charity videos. However, sources reveal that some of these so-called "social activists" have turned charity



into a lucrative business—collecting hefty donations from generous diaspora Tamils, giving away a fraction to the needy, and using the rest to fund their own extravagant lifestyles. From flashy bikes and cars to the latest iPhones, some "helpers" seem to be helping themselves a little too much. As one observer quipped, "They're not just lifting the poor; they're lifting their own bank balances too!"

Recently, a so-called YouTuber with lakhs of subscribers found himself at the receiving end of public outrage. Known for his "charity work," his actions had long been questionable. But one incident pushed Jaffna residents over the edge.

This YouTuber visited the home of a poor schoolgirl who had scored 1A and 2Bs in her A/L exams. Coming from an underprivileged background, she had already faced enough struggles. But what happened next left Jaffna fuming.

Under the guise of offering aid, he arrived at

her house late at night. When she refused to come outside, saying, "They'll record a video... I don't want to be filmed." The YouTuber was caught sneering on camera:

"Won't she even show up for the video? Who does she think she is—Aishwarya Rai?"

This wasn't his first display of insensitivity. In previous videos, he and his companions had openly mocked the way poor people pleaded for help on camera. In one video, he even acted out how poor people cry to gain their sympathy.

But this latest stunt crossed a line, and the people of Jaffna had had enough.

He was given an exclusive reality check—by an angry mob! After his tasteless video surfaced, he attempted to visit the girl's house again, this time for damage control. However, his damage control mission ended with the people controlling him! The enraged locals surrounded him, gave him a warm welcome, detained him on the spot, and handed him over to Ilavalai police.

This incident has sparked widespread outrage against exploitative YouTubers who chase views, subscribers, and money under the pretense of helping the poor. Many are now calling for stricter regulations on content creators, questioning whether social work should be reduced to a mere publicity stunt for online fame.

MONITOR MEMO

TNGO-TNPF Alliance on the Cards? Talks Underway

Credible sources have informed Jaffna Monitor that the Tamil National Green Organization (TNGO), led by environmentalist P. Aingaranesan, is in discussions to form an alliance with the Tamil National People's Front (TNPF) for the upcoming local government elections.



According to sources, negotiations between the two parties are currently underway. This development comes after the TNGO had earlier engaged in talks to join the Democratic Tamil National Alliance (DTNA), a coalition comprising nine parties.

However, at the last minute, the party withdrew from those discussions, opting instead to explore a possible alignment with the TNPF.

Despite these reports, neither the TNGO nor the TNPF has officially confirmed or denied the alliance at the time of writing. Further updates on the ongoing negotiations are expected in the coming days.



Archchuna Talks the Talk- Louder Than Any Other Jaffna MP!

Despite his controversial nature, Archchuna Ramanathan has emerged as the top-performing parliamentarian from Jaffna, according to the latest Manthri.lk parliamentary performance rankings. Securing the 44th position nationally, he stands out as the most active representative from the district, surpassing his counterparts in legislative engagement.

Representing Independent Group 17, Archchuna's rise in the rankings is attributed to his consistent participation in parliamentary debates, committee discussions, and legislative affairs. Whether or not his contributions have been impactful, his active involvement—unlike that of many other Tamil MPs—is noteworthy.

Data indicates that his participation spans key policy areas such as health, rights and representation, and governance. Notably, he has attended 14 parliamentary sessions, making significant contributions to discussions on critical issues.

Gajendrakumar Ponnambalam, leader of the Tamil National People's Front (TNPF), has secured the 50th position nationally, making him the second-highest-ranked MP from Jaffna. His most notable contributions are in the area of rights and representation, where he holds the top rank nationally.

Another Tamil MP demonstrating substantial engagement is Sivagnanam Shritharan of the Illankai Tamil Arasu Kachchi (ITAK), who has secured the 62nd position overall. With nine parliamentary sessions to his credit, Shritharan has contributed to discussions on issues ranging from labor and employment to justice, public order, governance, and administration.



Archchuna Ramanathan

In contrast, the three MPs elected from the National People's Power (NPP) in Jaffna, despite receiving strong electoral support, have recorded minimal engagement in parliamentary affairs. Karunanathan Ilankumaran, who secured the highest number of votes in Jaffna in the last parliamentary election, is ranked 145th nationally. His participation has been limited

to just one parliamentary session, with his only recorded contribution being in the area of natural resources and the environment.

Another NPP MP, Sri Bavanandarajah, has ranked even lower, standing at 159th nationally, with his parliamentary engagement confined to a single session. Meanwhile, Rajeevan Jeyachandramoorthy, another MP from Jaffna, has ranked 115th, having attended one session but with no recorded contributions to parliamentary discussions.

“Prabhakaran Wanted to Be the Sole Leader of Sri Lankan Tamils-That’s Why He Killed My Father”

- Amirthalingam’s Son,
Baheerathan

BY:

Our Special Correspondent

Dr. Amirthalingam (Ravi) Baheerathan, a Consultant Psychiatrist, is the youngest son of Appapillai Amirthalingam, a prominent Tamil political leader who is still regarded by some Tamil leaders and sections of the community as the Thesiya Thalaivar (National Leader) of Sri Lankan Tamils. In a tribute to his parents, Baheerathan recently inaugurated a memorial house in Jaffna in honor of

hellojaffnamonitor@gmail.com



Dr. Amirthalingam Baheerathan

his father and mother, Mangaiyarkarasi. Jaffna Monitor engaged in an in-depth conversation with him to discuss his father's legacy, the significance of commemoration, and his perspectives on the Tamil identity and its future.

Why did you decide to establish the Amirthalingam-Mangaiyarkarasi Memorial now?

The house that has been converted into a memorial was the only property my father personally owned. Before entering politics, he had a few properties, including a shop he was given by his father-in-law. However, this house was the only property he acquired himself. Due to his political activities, he lost some of his other properties.

The foundation for this house was laid in 1959, and it was gradually built until 1970. His political involvement delayed its completion. After losing the 1970 election in Vattukottai, he resumed working as a lawyer to earn money and was eventually able to complete the house.

Today, the house belongs to me. I often wondered what should become of it after my time. That's when I decided to turn it into a memorial house for my parents.

Given the current political climate, I felt it was necessary to honor my father's legacy. I also believe that future generations could learn invaluable lessons from his courageous and unwavering political career.

Many in today's younger generation have no direct experience or memory of your father. However, some label him a traitor simply because he was killed by the Tigers. How do you want

your father to be remembered?

I have no choice but to laugh and walk past those who call him a traitor.

But this is not just about remembering my father—it is about ensuring that our political struggle is not forgotten by the younger generation. We must not think that our struggle began only after the 1983 riots and ended in silence in 2009 with the annihilation of the LTTE.

Our movement has a long and complex history. Our fight for rights began in 1948. It took on a new dimension and escalated into an armed struggle after 1983. However, until 1983, the Tamil struggle remained largely non-violent.

Even today, our struggle remains justified. Successive Sri Lankan governments continuously deceived us and refused to grant our rights. It was these repeated betrayals that left us with no choice but to put forward the demand for Tamil Eelam through the Vaddukoddai Resolution in 1976.

The reason we pursued the Tamil Eelam demand and fought for it lies in our long history of being deceived, from 1948 to 1976. The anti-Sinhala Only protests of 1958, the Satyagraha of 1962—all of these were integral parts of our struggle. Each stage of our resistance ultimately led to the armed struggle. The younger generation must not forget this.

Looking back almost 50 years after the Vaddukoddai Resolution, do you still believe that the resolution arose from genuine grievances, or was it used as a political maneuver by our leaders, including your father?

I see it as the right decision for that time, made by our leaders, including Thanthai Selva and my father.

In 1972, when the Sirimavo Bandaranaike government introduced a new Republican Constitution, it officially abolished Section 29 of the Soulbury Constitution, which had provided limited protections for minority rights. This new constitution declared Sri Lanka a unitary state, making Sinhala the only official language and Buddhism the foremost religion, further marginalizing the Tamil people.

At that time, S. Tharmalingam from the Tamil Arasu Katchi (Federal Party) was part of the committee responsible for drafting the constitution. He presented a seven-point proposal that sought to guarantee language rights, equal representation, and regional autonomy for Tamils. However, this proposal was completely rejected by the ruling government. As a result, the limited safeguards granted to minorities under the Donoughmore (1931) and Soulbury (1947) Constitutions were entirely removed in the 1972 Constitution.

It was after this betrayal that Tamil leaders came to the conclusion that negotiating with the Sinhala-majority government was futile. They realized that the Tamil people could no longer coexist within a system that repeatedly denied them their fundamental rights. This led them to demand an independent Tamil state—Tamil Eelam.

The Vaddukoddai Resolution of 1976 was a historic turning point, as it was the first official declaration that Tamil Eelam was the only solution to the ethnic conflict. However, it is important to note that the resolution did not close the door on negotiations. It stated that

if the Sri Lankan government ever decided to grant the Tamil people their rightful rights, the Tamil leadership would be willing to reconsider the demand for a separate state.

Therefore, the Vaddukoddai Resolution was not an act of political opportunism—it was a desperate but justified call for self-determination, made in response to the Sri Lankan state's long history of deception and oppression.

But can you accept that the Vaddukoddai Resolution radicalized an entire generation of Tamil youth and led to the brutal war and the deaths of countless Tamil people?

No. The Students' Council was formed in 1972, even before the Vaddukoddai Resolution was passed. Their ultimate objective was to pursue an armed struggle for an independent Tamil state. This shows that Tamil youth were already disillusioned and driven towards militancy, not because of the resolution, but due to systemic oppression.

One of the major triggers was the Standardization Policy, introduced by the Sirimavo Bandaranaike government in 1971. It deliberately lowered university admission marks for Sinhalese students while raising them for Tamil students, drastically reducing Tamil representation in higher education. This was widely seen as an attempt to suppress Tamil advancement, leading to frustration and resentment among Tamil youth.

We Tamils were pushed into a situation where it became impossible to achieve justice through peaceful means while remaining unarmed.



That is why Tamil youth were ultimately forced to take up arms. It was not the Vaddukoddai Resolution that radicalized them—it was the Sri Lankan state's policies, violence, and repeated betrayals that left them no other choice.

I will not say that Tamil youth taking up arms at that time was a mistake. Just as Mahatma Gandhi could negotiate peacefully with the British, we could not negotiate peacefully with the Sinhala military, police, and state-sponsored mobs that came to destroy us. The Sri Lankan government at that time did not treat Tamils as equal citizens; instead, it unleashed violence, state repression, and massacres against them.

Some people confidently say that your father was the most influential political leader in Sri Lankan Tamil society. However, the fact that the Tigers branded him a traitor and brutally assassinated him—and that some still

justify it-how do you see this?

What I find truly shameful is that when the armed struggle began, none of the militant groups initially fought against the Sinhala government. Instead, their first target was the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF)—the very party that had been democratically chosen by the Tamil people to represent them. They believed that to gain recognition and legitimacy, they had to eliminate the existing Tamil leadership.

The LTTE took this to another level by killing my father. This was a deeply flawed approach, and it played a major role in our eventual downfall. By silencing moderate and experienced leaders, the armed groups alienated Tamil society from global diplomatic channels and left our people with no room for negotiation.

If you look at South Africa, Nelson Mandela was initially imprisoned for advocating violence. However, he later abandoned violent

tactics and pursued non-violent diplomacy, which ultimately led to the fall of apartheid. Meanwhile, Steve Biko and the Black Consciousness Movement engaged in armed resistance but ultimately sacrificed themselves in the process.

Despite their ideological differences, Steve Biko never called Mandela wrong. In his interviews, he always said, "Mandela's way is his way, and we support that." The LTTE, on the other hand, never tolerated any alternative perspectives. Instead of working alongside political leaders, they turned against them, which fragmented the Tamil struggle and weakened our cause.

The main reason the LTTE branded my father a traitor was because they wanted to establish themselves as the sole representatives of the Tamil people. Prabhakaran wanted to be the undisputed leader of the Sri Lankan Tamils.

In the 1977 democratic elections, which was the last democratic election before my father was assassinated by the LTTE, the Tamil people overwhelmingly gave their political mandate to the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF). This meant that any negotiation process had to be with the leaders chosen by the Tamil people.

Even when foreign diplomats visited Sri Lanka, their first choice was to meet with the TULF, as it represented the democratic will of the Tamil people. This undermined the LTTE's claim that they were the sole representatives of the Tamil struggle.

To eliminate this political obstacle, they targeted my father—and ultimately, they killed him. Another key reason why the LTTE saw my father as a threat was his support for the Indo-Lanka Accord.

He always believed that we should accept whatever political achievements we secured so that future generations could build upon them. Today, we have lost everything. The 13th Amendment exists only on paper, and Tamil political power has been systematically dismantled. My father foresaw this, which is why he supported the Indo-Lanka Accord.

He also believed that only India could resolve our problems and that India was our only true ally. China had no real interest in our issue and always viewed it as Sri Lanka's internal matter. The United States would never act independently—any move regarding Sri Lanka would always be discussed with India first.

Even during the Norwegian peace talks, Erik Solheim never came to Sri Lanka directly. His first stop was Delhi, then Chennai, and only after consulting Indian officials did he visit Sri Lanka. This proved that any solution to the Tamil issue had to go through India.

That is why it was necessary to accept what India offered and use it as a stepping stone for the next phase of the Tamil struggle.

After 1983, thousands of Sri Lankan Tamils became refugees in India, and all armed groups operated from Indian soil. Had the Tamil leadership rejected the Indo-Lanka Accord, India would have expelled all Tamil militant groups from its territory. The armed struggle would have been crushed before it even gained momentum.

By failing to understand political reality, the LTTE squandered every opportunity for the Tamil people to secure lasting political rights. Instead of building upon the diplomatic gains made by Tamil leaders like my father, they destroyed them.



A. Amirthalingam and Mrs. Mangayarkarasi Amirthalingam in Chennai, fasting in 1987 to urge the Indian government to intervene and stop Operation Vadamarachchi—an appeal that later led to Operation Poomalai.



After the assassination of A. Amirthalingam, his widow, Mrs. Mangayarkarasi Amirthalingam, meeting Rajiv Gandhi. In the background: Baheerathan's brother, Kandeepan. (Year: 1989)



Mrs. Mangayarkarasi Amirthalingam speaking at a TULF May Day meeting – 1982.

How old were you when your father was assassinated?

I was 28 years old. The day before my father was brutally assassinated, I had left for London to pursue my postgraduate medical studies.

I still vividly remember the moment I landed at London Airport—exhausted from the long journey, completely unaware that my world had already changed forever. As I was



Mr. and Mrs. Amirthalingam participating in the Satyagraha of 1961, a nonviolent protest led by the Federal Party (ITAK) against the Sri Lankan government's discriminatory policies



Rare photos of Mr. and Mrs. Amirthalingam

traveling from the airport, the devastating news reached me.

The weight of that moment is something I cannot put into words. The last time I saw him, he was standing at Colombo Airport, smiling. The photograph taken just before I left—at Katunayake Airport, with my father holding my son—became his final picture.

My father never feared death. As Swami Vipulananda Adigal wrote:

”அஞ்சினர்க்குச் சதமரணம், அஞ்சாத நெஞ்சத்து ஆடவர்க்கு ஒரு மரணம்” (“For the fearful, there are a hundred deaths; for the fearless, there is only one.”) This was not just a quote for him—it was a way of life. He carried himself with unshakable determination and a fearlessness that made him stand apart. And that was precisely why he was assassinated.

The LTTE could not break him, could not silence him, and certainly could not bend him to their will. They knew threats wouldn't work, intimidation wouldn't work, and bargaining



wouldn't work. So they eliminated him.

After his death, the TNA leaders who followed were exactly the kind of politicians the LTTE wanted—men who would obey, men who would carry files behind Tamilselvan like subordinates, men who would never dare to question. My father would never have been that kind of leader.

If he had chosen to stand with them, it would have been only for the sake of his people, not for his personal gain or his own safety. But he was never afraid of losing his life. He knew the risks, and he was always ready to die for his people. And in the end, he did.

Did the LTTE ever try to threaten your father before murdering him?

Yes, they did. In 1983, during the local government elections, the LTTE ordered a complete boycott. But my father refused to comply.



Amirthalingam meeting with then Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi –1983

Determined to enforce their command, the LTTE went from house to house, threatening every candidate who planned to contest the election. Many, fearing for their lives, withdrew. Reports of candidates withdrawing were published daily in the Eelanadu newspaper.

But a few leaders refused to be intimidated. One of them was Communist leader Subramaniam. The LTTE stormed into Subramaniam's home and beat him with the tail of a batoid fish. But he stood his ground, unfazed. "I will not withdraw," he declared. "What more can you do to me? If you're going to shoot me, then go ahead and shoot."

My father possessed the same unbreakable spirit. At his campaign rally at Jaffna's Five Junctions (Ainthu Santhi), LTTE cadres, including Charles Anthony and

Sellakili, stormed the event. They seized his government-issued car, which was parked outside, and drove it wildly through the crowd, firing in all directions as they sped toward the stage. Panic spread instantly—people screamed and ran for cover.

At that moment, the former Deputy Mayor of Jaffna, M.T. Sellathurai, rushed forward to shield my father. But my father, calm and resolute, simply said: "Step aside. They won't do anything to me. And if they do, so be it. Let them shoot."

Then, as if nothing had happened, he took a sip of the soda he was drinking and remained on stage. He did not flinch. He did not run. He refused to show fear.

Realizing that their intimidation tactics had failed, the LTTE reversed the car and fled.

They abandoned the vehicle near Kombayan Manal Cemetery before disappearing into the night.

But the Tigers knew very well that they could never break my father with threats or fear. And that is why they killed him.

Was he threatened in the days or months leading up to his assassination?

No, he wasn't directly threatened. However, the LTTE systematically spread rumors in foreign countries where Sri Lankan Tamils lived, falsely claiming that he had already been assassinated. I believe this was a calculated attempt to intimidate and threaten him.

He knew something would happen to him—it was only a matter of time. But as the Tamil proverb says, "One cannot flee to foreign lands out of fear of the moon" (நிலவுக்கு அஞ்சி பரதேசம் போக முடியாது). In a way, he was ready to die from the moment he entered politics. He always knew his life was under threat, but he never let that stop him.

But What Did They Achieve by Eliminating My Father? Not just my father, thousands of people lost their lives unnecessarily in our struggle.

Had we accepted the Indo-Lanka Accord, these losses could have been prevented. When that agreement was introduced, the death toll stood at around 2,000 civilians and 700 militants. But today, how many hundreds of thousands have we lost? Most of them died without even knowing why they were sacrificing their lives. And that is the greatest tragedy of all.

Who do you hold responsible for this destruction? Prabhakaran?

I would say that everyone who refused to accept the Indo-Lanka Accord is responsible. We were the ones who first started fighting against the Indian army that came to protect us. We were the ones who turned the peacekeeping force into a brutal force. No matter which country's military you provoke, they will always respond with force. It is wrong to instigate an army and then complain about the consequences. We took a military force that came to help us and turned it into our enemy. That was our greatest mistake.

A few writers have noted that Tamil leaders, including your father, wanted to use the LTTE as the unofficial military wing of their party or to settle scores with rival Tamil politicians who couldn't be defeated otherwise—like in the case of Alfred Duraiappah. What is your response to this?

Not at all. I know that some writers make such claims, but they have no factual basis.

Most of the leaders of the armed militant groups were originally members of the TULF Youth Wing. Prabhakaran was not part of it, but Uma Maheswaran was a representative of the Colombo youth wing of TULF. Varadaraja Perumal and Padmanabha were also members of the Youth Wing.

Even now, it has become common practice to blame Tamil political leaders, including my father, for inciting youth to take up arms. But the truth is, our youth were not merely brainwashed—they had their own grievances, their own reasons for choosing the path of



Dr. Amirthalingam Baheerathan

armed struggle. They did not take up arms simply because someone manipulated them; they believed their struggle was justifiable and accepted it as necessary.

The Tamil nationalism we speak of today was not something suddenly created by Prabhakaran. It was a concept nurtured from 1948 onwards, planted in the hearts of the Tamil people through the sacrifices of leaders, activists, and supporters of Tamil Arasu Katchi and the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF). It was not Prabhakaran alone who shaped this ideology. Unfortunately, over time, that sense of Tamil nationalism has started to fade.

Saying that my father was behind Duraiappah's murder is nothing short of absolute nonsense. At that time, the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) was focused on removing him

through democratic means. The party worked to pass a no-confidence motion against him to oust him from his position—not to assassinate him.

Not only in the case of Alfred Duraiappah, but some have also accused my father of being responsible for internal killings within militant groups, such as the murders of Comrade Sundaram, Iraikumarn, and Umaikumarn. However, these claims are baseless.

Blaming my father for internal killings within militant groups is absurd. He had no role in such incidents.

But some claim that Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) leaders, particularly your mother, publicly stated that Alfred Duraiappah would never die a natural death. Some also believe that such provocative speeches ultimately influenced Prabhakaran, who was deeply impacted by this rhetoric. What is your response to that?

The only person who ever made such a statement (that Duraiappah would never die a natural death) was Kasi Anandan.

There are many fabricated quotes falsely attributed to my mother, including claims that she said, "I will skin the Sinhalese and make sandals" or "I will peel off Sinhalese skin." These are outright falsehoods deliberately spread by Sinhala extremists in southern Sri Lanka to incite hostility against the TULF. Some Sinhala newspapers even published these false reports, further fueling misinformation.

My mother never made such remarks on stage in the presence of leaders like Thanthai Selva or my father. She was known for her emotionally charged speeches, often incorporating songs, and she spoke with deep passion, especially when addressing crowds. It is possible that she, like many others at the time, called Duraiappah a traitor. However, she would never have declared that he would not die a natural death.

It is true that Duraiappah was labeled a traitor, but that was because, during that period, anyone who collaborated with the government was seen as a betrayer of the Tamil cause.

Looking back, don't you think this "traitor" rhetoric inflicted deep harm on our people? Ironically, Alfred Duraiappah, who was branded a traitor, was killed by Prabhakaran, and the very people who labeled him a traitor were also eventually killed by Prabhakaran. Prabhakaran himself met his end in the Nandikadal Lagoon. After witnessing all this destruction, how do you now view this rhetoric? How do you see the "traitor-martyr" ideology today?

”மழித்தலும் நீட்டலும் வேண்டா உலகம் பழித்தது ஒழித்து விடின்.”

("What's the worth of a shaven head or tresses long, If you shun what all the world condemns as wrong?")

This is a verse from the Thirukkural (Kural 280), emphasizing that rituals or external symbols are meaningless if one does not act according to righteousness. This aptly suits Duraiappah.

We were meant to live in harmony with our people. But at that time, when 99% of the Tamil population supported the struggle for our rights, Duraiappah stood as an agent of the government.

I do not personally condemn Duraiappah. He did remarkable work for the Jaffna Municipality, improving infrastructure and services. However, when figures like Anura Bandaranaike and Sirimavo Bandaranaike visited Jaffna, he acted as a government agent, aligning himself with the state's interests rather than the people's aspirations.

I do not believe that branding those who aligned with the government as traitors was wrong, because this is a common occurrence in any country where people are engaged in a struggle against oppression.

Similarly, in countries where armed movements rise against the state, those perceived as government representatives are often targeted—this is not unique to Sri Lanka. Even during India's freedom struggle, similar events unfolded.

You say that Alfred Duraiappah acted against the will of 99% of the Tamil people. But wasn't he continuously elected as the Mayor of Jaffna through democratic elections?

He did not win any elections after 1970.

But he was still the Mayor of Jaffna at the time of his death, wasn't he?

Yes. But the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) was actively working to bring a no-confidence motion against him due to his anti-Tamil actions.

So, do you support Alfred Duraiappah's murder?

No, no. I will never justify the killing of any individual. I will never say that it was right.

Did you ever meet Prabhakaran? We heard that he was once a great admirer of your father and that he liked him.

Yes, I met him many times. After the Pondy Bazaar shooting incident in 1982, Prabhakaran was required to live in Madurai as a bail condition. During that time, he stayed at Pazha. Nedumaran's house. At that time, I was a medical student at Madurai Medical College, so our paths crossed.

During the 2002 peace period, someone told me that Prabhakaran had said, "I did not order Amirthalingam's assassination; it was Mathaya's doing." But I never believed that. The LTTE was an extremely disciplined and tightly controlled organization-nothing happened without Prabhakaran's knowledge or approval.

Setting aside personal feelings, how do you view Prabhakaran?

He should have acted based on what was best for the Tamil people, not merely what was best for the LTTE. That was his greatest mistake.

However, I still respect him as a leader who built one of the most powerful armed movements.

There is a time to fight and a time to negotiate-no community can remain in a state of constant war. What we lost was not small.



A. Amirthalingam

Prabhakaran should have accepted the Indo-Lanka Accord. He could have even become the Chief Minister under that agreement. Had he done so, much of the destruction we suffered could have been avoided. Even the current tragic state of the Tamil people could have been prevented.

In that aspect, what he and the LTTE did to the Tamil people was a grave injustice.

Answer in one sentence-Did Prabhakaran bring good or harm to the Eelam Tamil people?

In the end, it was harm-no matter how hard they fought or how many thousands of young lives were sacrificed, we gained nothing.

We achieved absolutely nothing. The only so-called political gain we have today is the 13th Amendment, which exists merely on paper. Had we worked alongside the Indian government, today we would either be an



A. Amirthalingam with then Sri Lankan President J.R. Jayewardene.

independent nation or at least governing a unified Northern and Eastern Provincial Council.

Our land and language would have been protected-but now, we have lost everything.

You and your mother personally met the security officers who killed the men responsible for assassinating your father?

In 2011, Saroj Pathirana from BBC Sinhala Service took us to meet them. We met Nishanka, one of my father's security officers-a loyal guard who tried to save my father. In the history of Sri Lanka, this was the only instance where the assassins of a political leader were immediately killed on the spot. For that, we owe them our gratitude.

When my father was killed, Sirimavo Bandaranaike herself attended the funeral and told my mother: "I'm really pleased, Mrs. Amirthalingam, that our people didn't do it."

How do you see the irony that a beloved Tamil leader was assassinated by the LTTE, which claimed to represent Tamils, but the security officers-who risked their lives to save him-were from an ethnicity that was at war with the Tamils?

This is one of the greatest ironies of our history. Individually, the Sinhalese people are good-hearted, cultured, and respectable. The political conflict may have divided our communities, but on a human level,



Mr. and Mrs. Amirthalingam with then Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.G. Ramachandran.

compassion and loyalty transcended ethnic lines.

Until the final phase of the war, it was not the Sinhalese who were responsible for assassinating Tamil leaders—it was the Tamil militant groups themselves.

For example, V. Dharmalingam, who dedicated his life to the Tamil cause, was tortured and brutally murdered by the TELO, who then dumped his body in the fields like it was worthless.

And in my father's case, the ones who stood between him and death, who fought to protect him, who risked their own lives to save him, were his Sinhalese security officers. They saw a man they had sworn to protect, and they fought for him.

How do you view the current state of the Tamil Arasu Katchi (ITAK)? Their representation in Jaffna has now been reduced to just one seat.

I never held an important position in the



A. Amirthalingam with S.J.V. Chelvanayakam, the founder of the Federal Party (ITAK) and a key advocate for Tamil rights in Sri Lanka, and M. Karunanidhi, then Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu and a prominent Dravidian leader.

party-I was just an ordinary member. But after 2018, the ITAK I see today is unrecognizable.

I have no idea what its leaders are doing or why they are doing it. There is no clear direction, no vision. This situation benefits neither the party nor the Tamil people.

The people's disappointment is evident, which is why they elected three NPP MPs—a Sinhala-based party—in Jaffna. This shows that people have started believing that ITAK is useless and incapable of doing anything meaningful.

Whom do you blame for this?

I don't know if a single person can be blamed. I would say it is the failure of collective leadership. They have lost the trust of the people and lack the unity needed to act effectively. Instead of working together, they are engaging in petty cliques and legal battles, which bring no benefit to our people.

The Monk Who Walked for Peace-And Fell to Bullets, Remembered in Jaffna

■
BY:
Our Reporter

Relatives of Rev. Yokotsuka Nobuyuki, the Japanese Buddhist monk who was tragically gunned down by Tamil militants in Jaffna 41 years ago, recently returned to the very place where his life was cut short. Joined by fellow Japanese Buddhist monks, they gathered on Mathews Street near St. Mary's Cathedral—the exact spot where he was assassinated on March 2, 1984—for a solemn remembrance ceremony. With prayers echoing



Rev. Yokotsuka Nobuyuki





through the very streets where he once walked for peace, the ceremony honored his legacy.

Rev. Yokotsuka, a 32-year-old disciple of Nichidatsu Fujii of the Nipponzan Myōhōji order, had been in Sri Lanka since the late 1970s, dedicating himself to peace. Even as the ethnic conflict and the undeclared war escalated following the 1983 pogrom, when most Buddhist monks left Jaffna, he remained steadfast in his mission. Locals who still remember him told Jaffna Monitor that every day, he walked the streets of Jaffna, beating his handheld raban drum and chanting prayers for peace. Unlike many Buddhist monks in Sri Lanka, who receive alms at their temple doorstep, Rev. Yokotsuka lived humbly, walking the streets and relying on offerings from the public.

The Tragic End of a Peaceful Mission

As tensions grew, rumors spread that the Japanese monk was not who he claimed to be.

Some in Jaffna believed he was a spy disguised as a monk. A local recalled advising him to leave for his safety, warning that militants might harm him. Yet, Rev. Yokotsuka was determined to continue his peace marches.

On March 2, 1984, as he walked through the streets, chanting and beating his raban drum, gunmen approached him. Witnesses recall a heartbreaking moment—upon seeing his attackers advance, he bowed deeply, a gesture of reverence rooted in the teachings of the Never Despising Bodhisattva from the Lotus Sutra, which emphasizes the Buddha nature within all beings. Seconds later, gunshots rang out.

Eyewitnesses found him lying on the roadside and rushed him to the hospital, but he could not be saved.

Who Killed Rev. Yokotsuka?

Responsibility for the assassination has long



been attributed to Tamil militants. While multiple armed groups operated in Jaffna at the time—such as LTTE, TELO, PLOTE, and EPRLF—the widely accepted account is that LTTE gunmen carried out the killing. Although the LTTE never officially claimed responsibility (as they often avoided public acknowledgment of attacks on foreign nationals or clergy), reports from that time strongly suggest their involvement.

Japanese historical records explicitly state that LTTE cadres assassinated Rev. Yokotsuka. At the time, the LTTE was emerging as the dominant guerrilla force in Jaffna, known for its ruthless suppression of perceived opponents.

The assassination caused a major uproar in Sri Lanka's southern media, where it was framed as the brutal killing of a peaceful Buddhist monk by Tamil militants. The Catholic Bishops' Conference of Sri Lanka condemned the act, calling it a "sacrilegious shooting of an innocent person."

Insider Accounts Confirm LTTE's Role

Credible sources within the LTTE, who were in Jaffna at the time, told Jaffna Monitor that the order to assassinate Rev. Yokotsuka came directly from Captain Pandithar, a childhood friend of Prabhakaran and the overall commander of LTTE forces across all districts. According to these sources, the individual who carried out the attack was later killed in an ambush in Achchuveli, an attack that also claimed Pandithar's life.

During this period, many LTTE members were still undergoing training in India. Those who had completed their training lacked firearms, as the LTTE's first arms shipment—largely funded by Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.G. Ramachandran—arrived only in October 1984. A former LTTE member recalled that some cadres returned to Sri Lanka armed only with machetes, as they had no access to firearms at the time.



Arun Siddharth

Tamil Nationalists Cry About Being ‘Second-Class Citizens,’ But They Treat Tamil Dalits Worse Than That!”

– Arun Siddharth in an Explosive Interview



BY:

Our Special Correspondent

Arulanandam Arun, better known as Arun Siddharth, is arguably the most controversial figure in Jaffna’s political arena. While mainstream Tamil political forces—despite their fierce rivalries—tend to move in the same ideological direction, Arun has chosen a different path, one that often

places him in direct opposition to Jaffna's dominant narratives.

A vocal critic of Jaffna's brand of Tamil nationalism, Arun is equally outspoken against the region's entrenched caste hierarchy and socio-political norms. He serves as the convener of the Jaffna Civil Society Centre and the coordinator and leader of the Jaffna Periyar Study Circle and the Ambedkar People's Movement—organizations dedicated to challenging traditional caste structures and social injustices in Jaffna.

However, what makes him one of the most polarizing figures in Jaffna is his association with hardcore Sinhala nationalist forces. He serves as the Jaffna and Kilinochchi District President of the Mawbima Janatha Pakshaya (MJP)—a party known for its strong Sinhala nationalist ideology—and is also a Supreme Council member of Sarvajana Balaya, an alliance of Sinhala nationalist parties in which MJP plays a significant role.

Adding to the controversy, Arun recently announced his plan to erect statues of Periyar (Erode Venkatappa Ramasamy) and Dr. B.R. Ambedkar in Jaffna—a move that has infuriated hardcore Tamil nationalists, who have long despised Periyar for reasons best known to them.

For the majority of Jaffna-based Tamil media, Arun is persona non grata. He has been blacklisted, silenced, and branded a traitor—a man perceived as an ally of Sinhala nationalism in the heart of Tamil politics. But at Jaffna Monitor, we do not follow the herd.

We believe in doing journalism differently. Breaking through the unofficial media blackout, we sat down with Arun Siddharth for an in-depth conversation—to hear his side of the story, to understand his ideology, and to confront the controversies that surround him.

Why do you think Periyar is necessary for the Sri Lankan Tamil context? Some hardcore Tamil nationalists say that Periyar is the number one enemy of Eelam Tamils. What is your response to that?

I recognize their nervousness about Periyar and his ideology. From their perspective, this apprehension is entirely logical because their definition of "Eelam Tamils" is restricted to the dominant caste Saiva Vellalars.

For centuries, these Tamil nationalists have enjoyed privileges inherited by birth—keeping people in bondage, exploiting their labor, subjecting Dalit women to sexual slavery, and forcing Dalit men into bonded labor. It is only natural that they oppose Periyar.

Moreover, rather than viewing Periyar as just an individual, if we see him as a symbol, his three core principles directly challenge these Tamil nationalists. The first is rationalism—how can one be an ultra-Tamil nationalist while possessing even a shred of rationality? The second is social justice—one cannot truly advocate for social justice while remaining bound by caste, ethnic, linguistic, or religious biases. The third is self-respect—a Tamil nationalist with genuine self-respect would inherently reject a system that thrives on caste-based oppression, as true self-respect contradicts the very notion of subjugating others.

Furthermore, these Tamil nationalists are deeply patriarchal, embodying the very essence of oppressive patriarchy. Periyar, on the other hand, was a staunch advocate for women's liberation.

So yes, I completely understand their panic.

Are they opposing Periyar because they lack understanding of him, or are they opposing him with full awareness of his ideology?

The architects of Tamil nationalist ideology in Sri Lanka are fully aware of their actions and understand Periyar's ideology well. However, their followers—driven more by rhetoric than by genuine understanding—oppose Periyar without truly grasping what he stood for.

In India, Tamil nationalism—shaped by the Justice Party, Periyar, social justice movements, and the Dravidian movement—was progressive, left-leaning, anti-patriarchal, and supportive of the oppressed. In Tamil Nadu, these values formed the very foundation of Tamil nationalism.

But in Sri Lanka, what is passed off as Tamil nationalism is a casteist, Saiva Vellalar-dominated, patriarchal, and regressive ideology. It is ultra-right-wing, reactionary, and fundamentally opposed to social justice. True Tamil nationalism is supposed to fight oppression, but Sri Lankan Tamil nationalism has been built on oppression itself.

The elite caste leaders of this movement are not ignorant; they know exactly what they are doing. They realize that if the oppressed classes embrace a Tamil nationalism based on justice and equality, their fabricated, casteist version will collapse.

Meanwhile, Dalits—whose long history of systemic oppression has been deliberately erased—lack an understanding of their own past. This lack of awareness makes them vulnerable to being manipulated under the guise of Tamil nationalism.

Why do you align yourself with figures widely regarded as Sinhala nationalists,

such as Dilith Jayaweera, Wimal Weerawansa, and Udaya Gammanpila, instead of advocating for a form of Tamil nationalism rooted in social justice that unites the oppressed against the falsehoods of mainstream Tamil nationalism?

The answer lies in a strategy inspired by leaders like B.R. Ambedkar and Periyar, who navigated oppressive systems with pragmatism to challenge dominant powers within their own communities.

During India's freedom struggle, when Gandhi boycotted the First Round Table Conference in 1930, Ambedkar chose to sit at the table with the British. Branded a traitor by nationalists, he stood firm. In his view, the independence Gandhi sought was not for Dalits but a handover of power from colonial rulers to upper-caste Hindus. In *What Congress and Gandhi Have Done to the Untouchables* (1945), he wrote:

"The Congress is fighting for the freedom of the Hindus and not for the freedom of India. The freedom it is fighting for is the freedom to rule over India in the place of the British."

At the First Round Table Conference, he argued that political power for the Depressed Classes required constitutional safeguards, not reliance on the goodwill of oppressors:

"We feel that nobody can remove our grievances as well as we can, and we cannot remove them unless we get political power in our hands."

Similarly, Periyar, disillusioned with the Brahmin-dominated Congress, saw British rule as a lesser evil than Brahminical hegemony. In a 1932 speech, he declared:

"If the British leave India, it will not mean freedom for us. It will mean the freedom of the Brahmins to oppress us more effectively. Under British rule, we have some chance to fight for our rights; under Brahmin rule, we will have none."

Both leaders understood that their primary oppressors were not just external forces but the entrenched elites within their own societies. They leveraged outside powers—the British—not out of loyalty, but as a tactical necessity to disrupt internal hierarchies.

This is why, as an experiment, I engage with Sinhala factions—not out of ideological alignment, but as a strategic necessity. If aligning with them creates an opportunity to challenge caste oppression, why should we not consider it? I am very clear that for our Tamil Dalit community, the primary oppressors are the dominant Vellalar caste.

The same elite caste figures who accuse me of working with Sinhala nationalist forces have historically been allies of oppressive governments.

Look at Gajendrakumar Ponnambalam, who now poses as the torchbearer of Tamil nationalism. His father, G.G. Ponnambalam, joined D.S. Senanayake's government in 1948, serving as a minister while endorsing the Citizenship Act that stripped Indian Tamils of rights. The LTTE, too, allied with Ranasinghe Premadasa against the IPKF and later took crores to enforce the 2005 election boycott, paving Rajapaksa's path to power.

If these elites could justify their deals with Sinhala forces, why is it treachery when Tamil Dalits explore a strategy to challenge our own oppressors?

You are aligning with Sinhala nationalists to oppose Vellalar dominance, which you

consider your primary enemy. But doesn't this undermine the Tamil nationalism that unites the oppressed and fights for their rights—the very Tamil nationalism that you acknowledge exists in Tamil Nadu?

Who is my real enemy? It is the Vellalar-dominated caste elite. Sinhala supremacists may also be our adversaries, but have Sinhala nationalists ever barred us from entering their homes? Have they ever denied us access to their wells? Have they ever practiced untouchability against us?

Even as enemies, they are willing to sit across the table and negotiate with me as an equal. They are ready to listen to my problems. But these Tamil caste elites continue to impose the same untouchability mentality.

Tamil nationalists constantly claim that "the Sinhalese treat us as second-class citizens." But they treat Dalits far worse, denying us even our most basic rights. If we classify our enemies into primary and secondary, then these Saiva Vellalar Tamil nationalists are our first and foremost enemies.

Critics argue that you have not genuinely experienced caste oppression and are merely exploiting the issue as a political tool. How do you respond to this allegation?

One does not need to be personally oppressed to speak out against caste discrimination. Periyar was not from an oppressed caste, yet he dedicated his life to dismantling the caste hierarchy. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar drew inspiration from Jyotirao Phule, who, despite not being a Dalit himself, fought against caste oppression and championed social justice. Even in global

history, figures like Abraham Lincoln, who was never enslaved, fought to abolish slavery. William Wilberforce, who was not Black, played a pivotal role in the abolitionist movement.

When people accuse me of raising caste oppression for political gain, my response is simple: Reducing this struggle to a mere political tool is dangerous. This is not just politics for me—this is my struggle. This is my history. This is the history of my ancestors.

Let me tell you about my history.

From the 1700s, for approximately 70 years, Sri Lanka was under Dutch colonial rule. During this period, a regional legal system known as the "Thesavalamai Law" was codified in 1707. The Thesavalamai Law applied exclusively to the Northern Province, which today consists of Jaffna, Kilinochchi, Mullaitivu, Mannar, and Vavuniya. It was drafted with the involvement of twelve Vellalar chieftains. Though formally codified by the Dutch, this was not a new law—it was merely the legalization of existing customs and traditions in the then-Jaffna peninsula.

This law explicitly legalized slavery, formally classifying four castes—Koviyar, Chandar, Pallars, and Nalavar—as slave castes. The eighth section of Thesavalamai explicitly used the term "male and female slaves," defining who was legally considered a slave, how they were to be treated, and what, if any, rights they possessed.

I belong to the Nalavar caste, one of the groups that were legally subjugated under this system.

The law reinforced a rigid caste-based hierarchy and institutionalized slavery within Tamil society. In the preamble of

Thesavalamai, the Dutch Governor stated that the Dutch administration had not introduced new laws but had merely codified the customs and traditions that had existed for centuries, with the assistance of the twelve Vellalar chieftains. This means the Dutch were not the architects of caste oppression—they merely formalized a system that had already existed for generations.



SECTION VIII.

OF MALE AND FEMALE SLAVES.*

- | | |
|---|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Different classes of slaves. 2. Marriages of slaves. 3. Division of the property of slaves dying without issue. 4. Division of property where there are children. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Duties of married slaves. 6. Sale of slaves having lands, &c. 7. Mode of emancipating slaves. 8. Of succession to the property of an emancipated slave. |
|---|---|

Different Classes of Slaves.

1 The slaves of this country are divided into four castes, viz., *Kóviyars*, *Chándárs*, *Pallars*, and *Nalavars*. It would be a matter of great difficulty to find out that the two former castes were slaves from their origin, as it is supposed that some of them were sold in ancient times by their parents or friends to others. This supposition is entertained especially with respect to the *Kóviya* caste, the greatest part of whom

A page from the Tēsaṅālamai, the traditional legal code of the Tamil community in northern Sri Lanka, explicitly detailing classifications, rights, and regulations concerning slaves, highlighting the existence of slavery within the legal framework of the time.

Thesavalamai imposed severe restrictions on these four castes. Education was legally denied to them, preventing any opportunity for social mobility. Land ownership was forbidden. Slaves were not allowed to own property or possessions—everything they had legally belonged to their master. They could only marry within their caste, reinforcing generational servitude. A slave's wife and children were considered the legal property of their master. Our ancestors were not even given the right to name their own children. Our female ancestors were often subjected to sexual exploitation, sanctioned by this law.

And now, you ask me whether I have been affected by caste oppression.

Can you rewrite American history by erasing the injustices inflicted on Black Americans? If you did, would that be seen as an attack on White Americans?

A massive chunk of Sri Lankan Tamil caste history has been deliberately erased—wiped from collective memory. Just as the United States had racist laws like Jim Crow, which enforced racial segregation and disenfranchised Black citizens, Sri Lankan Tamils had their own oppressive legal system—Thesavalamai Law, which remained in effect for over 150 years.

How can you expect me to overlook this history?

As Dr. B.R. Ambedkar profoundly stated, "They

cannot make history who forget history."

Can I call you a broken relic, scarred and bleeding from the pages of history?

Exactly.

My grandfather was a toddy tapper, he was an extremely hardworking man. Yet, until 1989, we did not even have a toilet of our own. When I questioned why a man like my grandfather, despite his relentless labor, could not afford something as basic as a toilet for his family, I came to understand the depths of the exploitation we endured.

While your grandfather had the privilege of education, mine was legally barred from it. And now, you turn around and ask, 'Why don't you just study and succeed? Everything is equal now.'

How is this equity? I am not talking about mere equality—I am talking about equity. This is exactly why reservations were introduced in India.

But here, in Sri Lanka, do we have any such system? Is there any reservation for us? How is it justifiable to compare a Vellalar student, whose ancestors had generations of education, to a student from my caste, whose ancestors were systematically denied the right to learn?

Don't you think that the personal pain, anger, and grievances you carry from past injustices might blur your vision on a larger scale? Could this be what led you to align with extreme Sinhala forces?

Maybe. Recently, countries like Australia and Canada have officially apologized to Indigenous peoples for historical injustices.

The Netherlands has acknowledged its role in slavery and other oppressive laws, stating, "We recognize our part in enacting oppressive laws, and we apologize for it." This is what true accountability looks like. Such actions help to heal deep-seated wounds.

However, to this day, the Vellalar elite in Sri Lanka refuse to acknowledge the historical injustices they inflicted upon us.

In 1931, under the recommendations of the Donoughmore Commission, Sri Lanka (then Ceylon) introduced universal adult suffrage, granting voting rights to all adults regardless of caste or gender. Before this, voting rights were predominantly limited to educated, upper-caste men. Women and oppressed castes were systematically denied the right to vote.

There was massive opposition to this. And who opposed these inclusive reforms? It was the very Tamil leaders of that era—the predecessors of today's so-called Tamil nationalists. Notably, G.G. Ponnambalam and other Tamil elites argued before the British that Dalits should not be granted voting rights. Ponnambalam even went so far as to say, "Do not throw pearls before swine," reflecting the utter disdain with which they viewed our community.

You have spoken extensively about your grandfather, who reportedly faced severe caste discrimination. Could you share more about his experiences and the caste oppression he endured?

My grandfather hailed from Kalla Kattuvan, a village in Chunnakam, Jaffna. The entire land in that village was owned by a single Vellalar landowner named Singa Mappanar. Historical records, known as Thombus, reveal that all the land was registered under the names of Vellalars. This was because Dalits were legally

prohibited from owning land under the Thesawalamai law.

The Vellala elites aligned themselves with successive colonial rulers—the Portuguese, the Dutch, and the British—to secure land ownership. They maintained cordial relationships with those in power to preserve their dominance.

My grandfather, along with his wife and ten children, lived on Singa Mappanar's land. They poured their physical labor into cultivating and enriching the soil, making it fertile. Yet, they were not allowed to pluck even a single coconut that grew there. Their only means of sustenance depended on the landowner's charity; they received no formal wages.

Even the milk from the cows they tended had to be handed over to the landowner. If the landlord offered anything in return, it had to be accepted with folded hands. Their only compensation was the food they were given to eat.

For generations, the labor of Dalit people was ruthlessly exploited. The Vellalars maintained us as bonded laborers, building their economic prosperity on our suffering. They refrained from physical labor themselves, instead amassing wealth through our toil. This wealth granted them access to education, and the combination of wealth and education enabled them to capture political power.

Political power is deeply intertwined with wealth and education. Deprived of wealth, we were denied education. Lacking both, we were excluded from political power.

This social structure persists even today. If you look at those working as daily wage laborers, 99.9% of them are Dalits. Can you find a single Vellalar working as a daily wage laborer? You cannot.

When was the practice of keeping Dalits as slaves abolished in Sri Lanka?

In 1833, the British Parliament enacted the Slavery Abolition Act, which came into effect on August 1, 1834. This legislation aimed to abolish slavery across the British Empire, including Ceylon. Until that date, the Vellala caste in Jaffna legally owned slaves, who were Dalits. I am a descendant of those enslaved ancestors, and I am fighting against the casteists who enslaved my forefathers.

Despite its formal abolition, the reality for many Dalits in Ceylon remained unchanged for years. The oppressors, long entrenched in socio-economic dominance, systematically concealed the abolition from their Dalit laborers. This deliberate suppression ensured that our ancestors continued to live and work as bonded laborers, unaware of their own emancipation.

It wasn't until 1957 that a meaningful legal intervention took place. The Sri Lankan government enacted the Prevention of Social Disabilities Act, making it a criminal offense to impose social disabilities on individuals based on their caste. This legislation—despite its shortcomings—granted all citizens the right to own property, receive an education, and seek employment without discrimination.

However, the path to true equality remained long and arduous. Even after this law was enacted, Dalits had to fight for years to exercise their basic rights. For instance, it wasn't until the late 1960s that Dalits in Jaffna were allowed to enter certain temples.

Notably, in 1968, during the Maviddapuram Temple Entry Movement, low-caste Hindus faced violent resistance from high-caste Hindus when they attempted to enter the temple.

Some may argue that such blatant caste

discrimination is a relic of the past. While overt oppression has diminished, caste-based discrimination has evolved into more insidious forms. Take, for example. In Tellippalai Thurga Amman Temple, non-Vellalars are still barred from carrying the deity.

How is this discrimination enforced in a more “refined” manner?

The temple mandates that only members of its Hindu Youth Association are allowed to perform the ritual of carrying the deity. But if a Dalit attempts to join this association, they are subtly excluded through excuses and bureaucratic tactics. Thus, caste oppression has taken on a more discreet, modern form.

In contemporary Jaffna, caste discrimination manifests most prominently when Dalits aspire for upward mobility. When Dalits are engaged in traditional, labor-intensive occupations—such as driving autos, working as mechanics, or performing daily wage labor—caste discrimination is not openly visible.

But the moment a Dalit becomes educated and competes with Vellalars in professional and academic spaces, caste-based barriers resurface in full force. A glaring example is the underrepresentation of Dalits in political spheres. To this day, there isn't a single Dalit Member of Parliament from the Northern Province.

Is the Prevention of Social Disabilities Act, enacted in 1957, strong enough to protect against caste-based discrimination?

No, it remains one of the weakest laws in Sri Lanka. Although the government enacted it, they never ensured its proper enforcement.

Take a recent example: a caste-based violent incident in Vaddukoddai.

Instead of registering the case under the Prevention of Social Disabilities Act, the police classified it as an ordinary violent offense.

Through my fieldwork and firsthand evidence, it is clear that this was a caste-based crime. Yet, the police are neither trained to recognize caste-based violence nor even aware that this law exists.

The most shocking part? The maximum punishment under this law is just a few thousand rupees.

Now, compare this to India's Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989. Indian law treats caste-based violence as a serious criminal offense. Under this act, those convicted of caste-based atrocities face imprisonment ranging from six months to five years, with harsher penalties for repeat offenders. The law also provides victim protection, compensation, and special courts to handle such cases.

Sri Lanka desperately needs similarly strong legislation to combat caste oppression and caste-based violence effectively.

Caste-based discrimination has been deeply ingrained in Sri Lankan society for thousands of years. Tragically, many oppressed individuals have come to accept it as a normal part of life. Speaking out against caste discrimination exposes their identity, which can bring even greater hardship.

For someone from an oppressed caste, openly fighting caste oppression means publicly identifying themselves as "lower caste"—a revelation that can have devastating social and economic consequences.

Why? Because the Vellalar caste dominates every major sector—education, employment, business, politics, and administration. If someone from an oppressed caste chooses to fight for justice, they are not only battling discrimination but also risking their job, their livelihood, and their place in society.

As a result, many oppressed individuals hide their caste identity. Instead of challenging the system, they try to blend in, pretending to belong to the dominant caste. Most Dalit people do not have the privilege or security to openly fight against injustice. They either accept caste oppression as their fate or conceal their identity to survive.

By speaking out against caste discrimination, I have personally faced significant losses. The only reason I can endure it is because I have the mental resilience to withstand the consequences. But not everyone has that privilege.

For instance, the second-in-command in our organization is a young Dalit man. One day, he confided in me: "Arun Anna, if I speak publicly about caste oppression, I will lose my job because my employer is from the Vellalar caste. I am willing to fight, but can you take care of my family if I lose my income?"

This is the cruel reality we face. The majority of Dalit people are still economically dependent on the Vellalars. Until we break this cycle of dependency, many will continue to remain silent—not out of choice, but out of fear, necessity, and survival.

Then why don't you fight with the central government or bargain with them to enact laws like reservations for Tamil Dalit people, as in India?

I have been meeting with key Sinhala political leaders to educate them about the historical

injustices we have endured. Many of them were completely unaware that Thesawalamai law functioned as a system akin to slavery. It was only after I pointed it out that they began to understand its impact.

However, our own Tamil parliamentarians will never allow such laws to be repealed—either legally or politically.

Take, for example, the 1957 Prevention of Social Disabilities Act. It was proposed by the ITAK (Federal Party)—a party that was, and still is, dominated by Vellalars. But this law was not enacted out of goodwill; it was forced upon them by the massive protests led by Dalit people in Jaffna.

If a similar large-scale protest were to erupt today, the Sinhala government would have no choice but to grant us reservations.

Governments act only when they are pressured. If we do not force them into action, they will dismiss caste discrimination as an "internal issue" and expect us to handle it on our own.

Did the Armed Struggle Reduce Caste Discrimination? Some argue that the Tamil armed struggle erased caste differences, citing the LTTE's claim of being a caste-free organization. They often highlight the rise of Tamilselvan, a man from the oppressed barber caste, who became the LTTE's political chief. What is your take on this?

When the armed struggle began, caste resistance movements were at their peak. It was a time of social upheaval, and naturally, many of those who joined militant groups came from oppressed backgrounds.

For these marginalized youth, holding a weapon for the first time was more than just participating in a war—it felt like power, like justice, like revenge. I believe that many oppressed-caste youths took up arms not only for Tamil Eelam but also because they carried generations of rage against caste discrimination. To them, the gun was not just a weapon; it was an equalizer.

However, while the gun gave them a sense of power, it did not erase caste. The armed struggle did not dismantle caste oppression; instead, it reinforced it in new ways. While oppressed-caste youth were recruited to fight and die, decision-making power remained firmly in the hands of the ruling caste—the Vellalars.

Those who carried rifles, who died in suicide attacks, and who ended up in prisons were overwhelmingly from oppressed castes. But those who crafted ideology, controlled leadership, and held the reins of power were the Vellalar elites. The influential figures behind the armed struggle ensured that they remained in control, dictating the course of the movement while sending the oppressed to the front lines.

They told the oppressed youth, “We need your sacrifice. We need you to fight.” But when it came to political power, governance, and leadership, they declared, “We are the most suitable to lead because we are educated and can speak English.”

Even Prabhakaran, a Karaiyar by caste, was not immune to this system. Despite leading the movement, he, too, was surrounded by Vellalar ideologues who shaped the narrative and structure of the struggle.

Do you really see Prabhakaran as a victim?

Yes, in many ways, I do.

Prabhakaran was not from the dominant Vellalar caste—he came from the fishing community (Karaiyar). Even within the Karaiyar caste, there were divisions: Mel-onki Karaiyars, who owned boats and were primarily businesspeople, and Kil-onki Karaiyars, who worked as laborers for them.

Prabhakaran belonged to the Mel-onki Karaiyars, and his grandfather owned business ships. His father was an influential government servant, so I am not sure if he personally experienced caste-based oppression.

However, Maravanpulavu Sachithanandan Iya once told me that in the late 1960s, when he organized protests against caste discrimination and untouchability, Prabhakaran participated in them.

But what I see is this—the Vellalar ideology used him for their own benefit. They didn’t just exploit Prabhakaran; they manipulated all the militant group leaders. They used these leaders to eliminate their political rivals. Prabhakaran’s first killing was that of Alfred Duraiappah, a man who could not have been defeated by our leaders through conventional means. This killing was motivated by them, and I believe Prabhakaran fell prey to their manipulation.

You announced that you will erect statues of Periyar and Ambedkar in Jaffna. What do you aim to achieve from this?

Both Periyar and Ambedkar are essential figures for us, but for two very different reasons.

Ambedkar was born into a Dalit community and denied dignity and equal rights. He was forced to stand outside the classroom while others studied inside. Yet, through education, he not only liberated himself but also wielded

knowledge as a weapon to draft the Indian Constitution, which enshrined reservations for oppressed communities.

His life teaches a powerful lesson—for every oppressed person, education is the ultimate path to freedom. That is why Dalits must see Ambedkar as their ideological torchbearer. He proved that knowledge can break chains.

But why Periyar? Because Periyar challenged caste oppression without relying on formal education. Unlike Ambedkar, he didn't hold academic degrees, yet he fearlessly fought against Brahminical supremacy and social injustices. His life tells us: "Even if you don't have an education, you can still fight against injustice. Even if you don't have wealth, you can still challenge oppression."

So, what am I trying to achieve? I want to embed their ideology in the heart of Jaffna—a place where caste oppression has been institutionalized for centuries. It is deeply entrenched in our history, our temples, our schools, and our society.

Within this year, these statues will stand on my own land, in front of my office on KKS Road.

They will serve as a constant reminder to every oppressed person in Jaffna that we have two roads to liberation—one through education, the other through resistance.

But some Tamil nationalists say they will vandalize the statues. What is your response?

Arumuga Navalar, the torchbearer of the Vellalar caste ideology, has statues in several places across Sri Lanka. His teachings directly contributed to caste-based oppression, untouchability, and the marginalization of Dalits. Yet, despite being his direct victims, we

have never attempted to vandalize his statues. Why? Because our belief is simple: "If you want to glorify him, go ahead. That is your ignorance, your foolishness."

Our mindset is different—we do not impose our ideology on anyone. You are free to think forward, and you are free to think backward. That choice is yours. But there is one thing I will never allow—you treat me as a slave.

Now, think about the fascist mindset of those who declare they will break Periyar and Ambedkar's statues. If society truly values democracy and freedom, people should say: "If others accept Periyar and Ambedkar, then let the statues remain." But instead, they say: "We will break them."

And what happens if they actually vandalize the statues?

If you don't break them, that's good. If you do break them, that's even better. Let me tell you why. The only living person in history to have his own statue erected during his lifetime was Periyar. And what did he say?

"One day, my statue will be broken. And when that happens, I will go there and ask, 'Why are you breaking it?' Then at least four people will start searching to find out what I said." That is exactly what will happen here.

Every act of vandalism will only amplify Periyar and Ambedkar's ideas even further. History has proven time and again—you cannot erase an ideology by mere destruction.

Jaffna-Trichy Flights Take Off After 50 Years



IndiGo Airlines is set to launch daily flights between Tiruchirappalli (Trichy), India, and Jaffna, Sri Lanka, starting from March 30, 2025. This marks the revival of a historic air route last operated by Air Ceylon nearly five decades ago, re-establishing a crucial air link that once played a vital role in connecting Tamil Nadu with Jaffna.

The reintroduction of the Trichy-Jaffna route is expected to strengthen trade, tourism, and cultural ties between the two regions, which share deep-rooted historical and ethnic connections. It also becomes the shortest international air route from South India and the second-shortest in India, providing a faster and more convenient travel alternative. The shortest international air route in India remains the Bagdogra-Paro flight operated by Druk Air, covering a distance of just 137 kilometers between India and Bhutan.

The aerial distance between Trichy and Jaffna is approximately 184 kilometers (114 miles), making it half the distance between Jaffna and Ratmalana Airport (329 kilometers) in Sri Lanka. This striking comparison underscores the fact that Trichy is geographically closer to Jaffna than Sri Lanka's commercial capital, Colombo.

According to IndiGo, flights will operate daily, departing from Trichy at 7:35 AM and arriving in Jaffna at 9:00 AM, while the return flight from Jaffna will take off at 2:00 PM and land in Trichy by 3:25 PM. However, the actual flight time is expected to be less than 30 minutes, according to sources.

Air Ceylon, Sri Lanka's former national airline, operated flights on this route until 1979, offering a key connection between

Continued on page 74



BY:

Dr. Shane Halpe



Viraj Jayasinghe with his wife Dilky, lovingly holding their only daughter (face concealed for privacy)

The year 2023 descended upon Sri Lanka like a storm—a relentless tempest of economic hardship. Fuel lines stretched for miles, power flickered and failed, and the weight of financial despair bore down on every household. The ghosts of the pandemic still lingered, while the echoes of the Aragalaya's fiery protests reverberated through the streets. In this crucible, survival became a daily, desperate struggle.

A Mother's Fight: Dilki's Journey after Viraj

Amidst this turmoil, within the walls of EPSB, a private electrical company, another tragedy unfolded. My mother, who managed EPSB, watched helplessly as the lifeblood of the company slowly ebbed away. Projects dwindled, the once-bustling workshop fell silent, and the agonizing decision to temporarily lay off staff loomed like a dark cloud.

Among those affected was Viraj Jayasinghe—a man who was more than just an employee; he

was a beacon of warmth within the company. Despite the economic pressures, Viraj remained a cherished member of the team, known for his kindness and willingness to help others. Recently married and the father of an 11-month-old daughter, he embodied the essence of a devoted family man.

The evening of February 14th-Valentine's Day—a day meant for whispered affections and tender gestures, twisted into a nightmare.

Viraj, on a simple errand, fulfilling his duty as a husband and father to stock the pantry, set out for groceries. He could never have known that this ordinary task would be his last.

On his return journey, he encountered a scene that would spark a tragedy—three teenage boys, reckless and wild, their motorcycles roaring down the street. A flicker of concern, the instinct of a father, stirred within him. “There are little children walking on this road,” he warned—a simple plea for caution, a gentle admonition meant to protect.

But his words, intended to safeguard, were met with brutal fury. A confrontation erupted—a senseless, violent clash. Ironically, the boys were students from the very school where Viraj’s wife, his beloved, taught. One of them, consumed by a rage beyond reason, seized a motorcycle helmet and struck Viraj—again and again. The blows were merciless, relentless.

Then, silence. Viraj collapsed, his world fading into darkness.

His wife, gripped by a growing dread as he failed to return, began a frantic search. She found him—broken, lifeless—on the roadside. The desperate race to Aluthgama Seenawaththa Hospital was in vain.

Ranga Viraj Jayasinghe—a husband, a father, a son—was gone. Just like that, at 34 years old, his life was stolen, leaving behind a gaping void: a widow drowning in unbearable grief and an infant who would never know her father’s embrace.

The autopsy—a cold, clinical recitation of brutality—revealed the truth: internal bleeding beneath the skull, exacerbated by the vicious assault. Within two days, the three teenage assailants, Grade 11 students, were apprehended by the Welipenna Police. They

were remanded at the Child Detention Center in Makola and later appeared before the Matugama Magistrate’s Court.

Adding to the tragedy, the teenagers, when questioned, appeared disturbingly placid, claiming they had no idea Viraj was their teacher’s husband. Even more shockingly, their parents confronted Viraj’s grieving wife—not with remorse, but with blame, questioning why her husband had dared to challenge their children.

The Aftermath: Dilki’s Struggle for Justice

For Dilki, Viraj’s widow, the tragedy did not end with his brutal death—it only deepened in the agonizing months that followed.

The three teenage assailants were remanded at the Makola Child Detention Center, but what should have been a place of reflection and consequence became a haven of privilege. Reports emerged that they were treated like honored guests—enjoying gourmet meals, comfortable accommodations, and personal counseling sessions. They were even transported in luxury vehicles, shielded from the weight of their crime.

Their initial bail applications were denied, in part due to shocking evidence presented in court—child protection officers had taken them to a high-end restaurant for an extravagant meal while they were supposedly in detention. The revelation sent waves of outrage through those seeking justice, but the system remained indifferent.

A Cruel Smear Campaign

As if Viraj’s murder wasn’t enough, Dilki’s pain was compounded by a malicious lie. A senior official from the Child Protection Authority appeared on journalist Chamuditha

Samarawickrama's show and spewed a defamatory accusation—falsely claiming that Viraj had been involved in an extramarital affair, insinuating that this was the motive behind the attack.

The cruel innuendo spread like wildfire, and soon, Dilki was bombarded with prying inquiries. She was forced to defend her husband's honor when she should have been allowed to grieve. She reached out to Chamuditha to refute the claims, but the weight of her sorrow was too much—she could not bring herself to face the cameras.

A Grave Disturbance

In May 2024, a fresh nightmare unfolded. Dilki learned that Viraj's remains had been disturbed—his upper body had been removed from the burial site, the very location designated by the Magistrate's Court.

She filed an appeal, arguing that the missing remains would prevent a proper exhumation and re-examination. When questioned by the judge about what actions had been taken on this matter, the police countered coldly, claiming she had failed to secure "official permission" to bury him there in the first place.

Instead of investigating the desecration, they charged her with legal action.

A History of Violence Ignored

Dilki fought tirelessly—not just for justice for Viraj, but to expose the troubling past of one of the teenage attackers.

She presented evidence that one of them had previously been accused of bringing and distributing narcotics at school. He was known for violent outbursts, disrespecting teachers, and instigating fights.

These children have returned to school, seemingly without consequence. It is almost certain they will recount their actions to their classmates, potentially encouraging others toward disruptive behavior—and even violence against innocent people.

A Mockery of Justice

The day the teenagers were released on bail, Dilki was confronted with a scene that shattered her faith in the justice system. As she grappled with her profound grief, the atmosphere surrounding the teenagers' release was disturbingly celebratory. Their parents hosted a lavish party, and as Dilki exited the courthouse, they openly mocked her, displaying a disturbing lack of empathy and accountability. They jeered at the widow whose life had been torn apart. Where was justice? Where was humanity?

A Broken System, A Woman Left to Fight Alone

In Dilki's eyes, the system is rotten to its core—a justice system riddled with inequity, a police force that silences victims, and a society that enables its children's worst impulses.

Moreover, a serious concern looms: are child protection authorities truly safeguarding children and adolescents, or are they, in effect, shielding potential criminals from accountability?

The three perpetrators were shown kindness—both by nature and by the system—securing for them bright futures and open prospects. In stark contrast, a grieving wife and an innocent infant were condemned to a life of uncertainty, shame, despair, and devastating isolation.

And as she wonders, with a sinking heart—will justice ever be served?

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

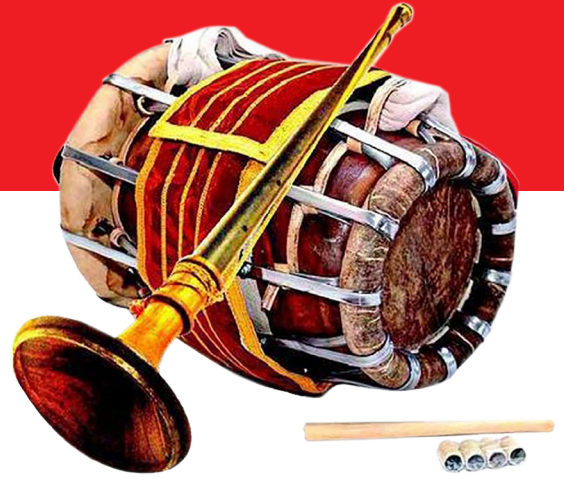
Part-4



BY:

Mahesan Nirmalan

**MBBS, MD, FRCA, PhD, FFICM
Manchester, United Kingdom**



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

One of the eternal truths of all times is that the tendency for change is built into all dimensions of the universe we live in. The Hindu saint Manikavasagar (மாணிக்கவாசகர்) in the 9th century encapsulated this eternal truth in his composition Sivapuranam (or (சிவபுராணம்) as “மாற்றமாம் வையகத்தின் வெவ்வேறே வந்தறிவாம்” (let us recognise the manifestations of a changing universe). Similar sentiments were summarised in Sinhala Buddhist teaching as “මේ අස්ථිර ලෝකේ තිබෙන එකම ඉස්තීර දෙය අර අස්ථිර බාවය පමණි” (the tendency for change is the only constant in this ever changing world). In this context, all dimensions of culture, including forms of music, have also undergone considerable changes over time. It continues to acquire new forms and these changes are largely dictated by the tastes and preferences of the listening public.

The nathaswaram and thavil music, as we have seen in parts 1, 2&3 of this series, was practiced by the nomadic musicians of the Deccan planes. It was introduced to South India by these moving tribes of people where it found widespread acceptance. In this context, the early music that was played using these instruments was no doubt in alignment with the folk music and dance traditions of these groups and was largely geared towards providing entertainment at social gatherings. However, as these groups found royal patronage - during the Chola and the subsequent Vijayanagara/Nayakkar periods (10th-18th centuries), and became accepted within the temple cultures of South India, the type of music and dance practiced by these groups also evolved and changed to suite the new settings. Pann Isai (பண் இசை), Carnatic music, Hindustani music and Baratha Natyam (பாரத நாட்டியம்) became the new genre of music that was acceptable to their new patrons and as a consequence the

Devdhasi/Nattuvanar (தேவதாசி நட்ருவனார்) communities - that were subsequently rename as Isai Vellalar (இசை வேளாளர்), also adapted their practice to become the main proponents of these 'new' art forms. (T M Krinshna. A Southern Music). Despite the discriminations they faced within a highly caste-conscious South Indian and Sri Lankan societies, the nathaswaram/thavil vidwans, who were also members of the Devdhasi/Nattuvanar community, became some of the greatest musicians who were responsible for developing carnatic music to new heights. T N Rajaratnam (TNR) Pillai from Thiruvavaduthurai (திருவாவடுதுறை ராஜரத்தினம் பிள்ளை) was one these legends whose musical genius was recognised all over India - so much so that he was invited by Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru to play a nathaswaram concert to mark the Indian independence. The name of TNR became synonymous with the classical raga 'Thodi' (தோடி ராகம்) and as a result he was



Mr Panchapikesan
Nagenthiran, the illustrious son of Vidwan Panchapikesan. His role is important in the musical history of the Tamil people in Sri Lanka as he has formed the link bridge between the pre-war vidwans from the 70s/80s and the new generation of artists, thus enabling the continuation of the musical traditions.

commonly (fondly) referred to as ‘Thodi Rajaratnam Pillai’. Many of the frontline vidwans of this period in South India and in Sri Lanka, played carnatic music exclusively and whenever they ventured into lighter forms of music towards the end of a concert, they would play one or two compositions of ‘light music’ by the Tamil poet Subramaniya Barathyar or melodies drawn from the Tamil cinema. Even when they did so, the selection of compositions they played were based on classic carnatic (or Hindustani) ragas.

The importance of cultural revival cannot be over stated in the rebuilding of the Sri Lankan Tamil community at the end of the prolonged civil war that lasted almost 3 decades. A generation of nathaswaram and thavil vidwans have played a monumental role towards this end in maintaining these musical traditions through this prolonged period that was marred by war, conflict with significant economic hardships to all professional musicians. Their dedication to this cause needs to be recognised by the entire community. Four of the more popular Vidwans need a special mention in this context as they have formed the link bridge between the elders in their community from the 70s/80s (the pre-war period) and the current generation of young post-war artists. P Nagenthiran from Chavakacheri, is the son of the very renowned Nathaswaram Vidwan Mr Panchapikesan (*see Part 1, Jaffna Monitor 15th December 2024; P: 38-53*), migrated to Canada during the troubled times and has continued to serve the Tamil community in Canada and many other European countries. Despite being domicile in Canada, he continued to travel to Sri Lanka very regularly where, along with other family members, he runs a training school aimed at nurturing budding new talents in the Thenmaratchi region.

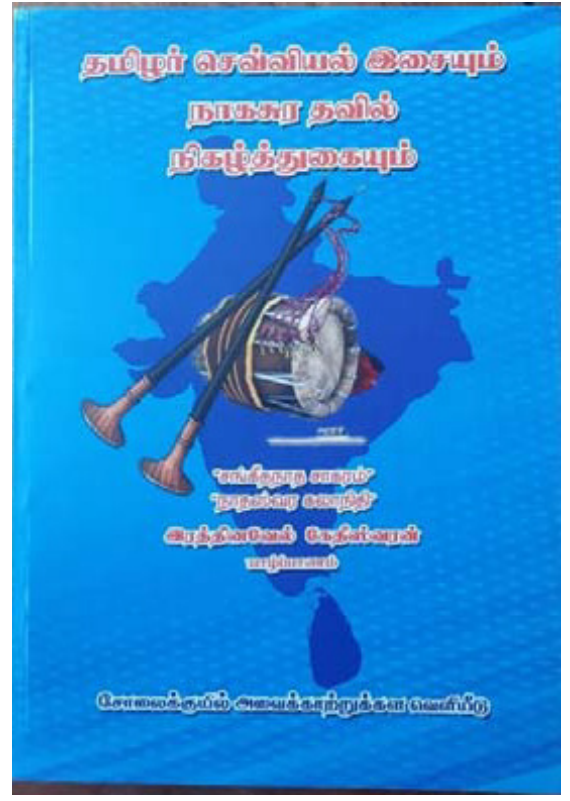
Similarly, the role played by a contemporary artist Mr T Ketheeswaran from Alavetti in the

continuation of the nathaswaram traditions before and after the war needs emphasis. In addition to being a very melodious nathaswaram player, who was the son of a popular Nathaswaram Vidwan Mr Ratnavel from Alavetti and a long term apprentice of Mr N K Pathmanathan, Ketheeswaran also painstakingly recorded the history of this art form in Sri Lanka. In the monograph he has published in 2025, in the presence of the Provincial Governor HE Mr N Vedanayagam, he outlines the important traditions that need to be observed in the practice of this art form and the role it has played in the wider cultural landscape of the Tamils in Sri Lanka. The book entitled “தமிழர் செவ்வியல் இசையும் நாகசுர தவில் நிகழ்த்துகையும்” (The Excellence of Tamil Music and the Practice of Nathaswaram Thavil music), is no doubt an essential read for all people with an interest in Tamil Music in Sri Lanka and is perhaps the first book dedicated to this art form to be published in the country. In recognition of his contributions he had been awarded the honorary titles of சங்கீத சாகரம் (The ocean of music) and நாதஸ்வர கலாநிதி (Doctorate in Nathaswaram) by various reputed leaned societies in the country. Along with his mentor Mr N K Pathmanathan, Mr Ketheeswaran performed at the 5th International Tamil Research Conference in 1981 and was decorated by the former Chief Minister Mr M G Ramachandran. He continues to travel all over the world performing at concerts that continue to delight the audiences and is also recognised as a literary giant within the Sri Lankan Tamil community.

These two musical geniuses have been supported by two eminent thavil vidwans who too came from very illustrious musical families in Sri Lanka. Mr T Udayashanker from Alavetti and the son of the all-time great thavil player Thakshinamurthy, and Mr S Suthaharan from Inuvil and the son of his illustrious father Mr Sinnarasa have withstood the pressures



A



B

A: சங்கீத சாகரம், நாதஸ்வர கலாநிதி *Mr T Ketheeswaran from Alavetti. Asthana Vidwan at the famous Naguleswaram Temple at Keerimalai, and an apprentice of Mr N K Pathmanathan.*

B: *The important academic contribution by Mr Ketheeswaran - தமிழர் செவ்வியல் இசையும் நாகசுர தவில் நிகழ்த்துகையும் (Solai Kuyil Avai Kaatru Publishers, Jaffna Sri Lanka 2025), is a landmark publication in the field.*

of war and mass displacement of musicians and have been true servants of their places of birth. Their contributions are important in the continuation of the traditions of thavil, in its purest form, in Sri Lanka despite the interruptions caused by the long war. They have been the bridge between the generation of current thavil players and their illustrious forefathers in the pre-war period.

There is however significant changes in the horizon. Age old traditions and conventions are being broken in order to cater to the needs and demands of the listening public. For example, supporting musical instruments such as the violin, electric organ, electric guitars, tabla, mridangam, gatam etc. are being introduced into concerts where the Nathaswaram plays a lead role. Increasingly, film music dominates the performances, with

proportionately less time being allocated to traditional compositions such as Mallary (மல்லாரி), Kirthanas (கீர்த்தனை), Alapanas (ஆலாபனை) and Kalpana swarams (கல்பனாஸ்வரம்). Thavil artists seem to place greater emphasis on louder and (perhaps more 'brash') improvisations over the more traditional and gentler styles that characterised both Thakshinamurthy and Sinnarasa in the 70s/80s. The popular media in some instances seem to prefer 'harsher' expressions such as 'அடி', 'அனல் பறந்தது' or அளவெட்டி அதிரந்தது (beating, sparks were visible during the playing or Alavetti vibrated) over more gentler expressions such as 'வாசிப்பு' (played) or 'தழுவி வாசித்தார்' (or caressed) when describing what a good thavil performance was/is. When questioned by the writer about these changing trends, both Mr Udaya Shanker (Son of Allavetti Thakshinamurthi)



A



B

A: Mr T Udayashanker from Alavetti, son of Alavetti Thakshinamurthi and B: Mr S Suthaharan from Inuvil, son of Mr Sinnarasa. Mr Thakshinamurthy and Mr Sinnarasa were brothers and hence Udayashanker and Suthaharan are first cousins. Together, they have held on to the art of classical thavil playing and have been instrumental in passing their skills to the current generation of thavil artists.

and Mr Suthaharan (son of Inuvil Sinnarasa) acknowledged that these changes in taste and emphasis are indeed happening – much to their dislike. One of them was open in his comment that “*if we stick to older traditional styles we will not be invited again by the organisers*”. There is no doubt that not all these changes are welcome additions to this ancient art form that has hitherto defined the very cultural identity of the Tamil community. Traditionalists such as Kambavarithi Jeyaraj (கம்பவாரிதி ஜெயராஜ் from Kamban Kalagam, Colombo) have openly expressed reservations of these changing trends and what impact it is likely to have on the unique identity the art form had maintained for centuries. Not all vidwans are however as pessimistic as some of the critiques. For example, Mr Panchamurthi – one of the few remaining elders within the community, told the writer that it is indeed possible to accommodate the wishes and requests of the listening

public without completely deviating from the traditional foundations of the art form. He even stated that, cinema music does pose several novel challenges and some of its nuances are technically harder to replicate in the nathaswaram.

The new generation of nathaswaram vidwans such as Mr Panchamurthy Kumaran and P S Balamurugan are however more optimistic. There is no doubt that the post-war revival of nathaswaram and thavil music in Sri Lanka has been spearheaded by two extremely popular artists – Mr Panchamurthy Kumaran and Mr P S Balamurugan. These two dashing young men, with their outstanding talents, professionalism and good looks continue to mesmerise ‘rasikas’ across the world. With a strong Tamil diaspora scattered all around the world and an economically thriving India these two artists have carried the nathaswaram music to all parts of the



A

A: Mr P S Balamurugan from Nallur and B: Mr P Kumaran from Kondavil. These two artists are currently the most popular Nathaswaram players in the world and are largely responsible for popularising this art form amongst the modern generation. Their adherence to traditional styles whilst accommodating the wishes of the new generation is most commendable. With invitations for performances coming from all over the world – including South India and the Deccans, where the intricacies of carnatic music is well understood, these two artists have clearly positioned Sri Lanka and the Sri Lankan Tamil culture as a force to be reckoned with in the world of classical music

world. Unlike many of their- perhaps more orthodox, predecessors, these two maestros have been more proactive in accommodating the changes mentioned above and have been instrumental in incorporating new innovations - including the introductions of new musical instruments, such as the electric guitar, violin, electric organ etc. into their performances. With this transformation, the nathaswaram and thavil are gradually being incorporated into a 'subserving' orchestral format rather than always being a free flowing lead solo instrument. This 'subserving' role is something which was unthinkable in the



B

past (and was almost considered a sacrilege) due to the belief that the nathaswaram being a 'Raja Vadyam' (ராஜ வாத்தியம் or a Royal Instrument) and its role was to lead and not follow a written script. Whilst including these instruments at concerts they play in more relaxed environments (such as weddings or cultural concerts), both Balamurugan and Kumaran have remained true to the history of their art forms at more formal settings such as the Temples. Kumaran told the writer that they still place a lot of emphasis on traditional compositions such as the 'Mallari' when they play at temple festivals even in Western



Mr P Kumaran (Right) with his father Mr K Panchamurthy from Kondavil.



A



B

A: Inuvil P S Senthilnathan (PSS), B: Inuvil P Vipoornan and C: Badulla Udayashanker: The current generation of Thavil Vidwans at the heart of the revival project. PSS is responsible for training many young children through his academy and Udayashanker has opened the possibility of this art form being accessible to emerging artists from the central hills in the country.



C

countries. Balamurugan told the writer, that “whilst accommodating the changing wishes and tastes of the ‘rasikas’ is essential for the survival of the art form, they – as the flag bearers of this traditional art form, are extremely conscious of the historic burden and responsibilities they carry on their shoulders in protecting the art form and its history”. Kumaran agrees with this sentiment. From a time period when the very survival of this art form was in question (due to many professional artists dying and/or migrating to undertake unrelated jobs in western capitals), the few remaining artists such as P Kumarn, P S Balamurugan, T Udaya Shanker, S Suthaharan and P S Senthilnathan have not only revived this art form, but have in many ways, taken it to new heights and true global recognition. Temples in many Indian states beyond Tamil Nadu – such as Kerala, Andhra, Karnataka and Maharashtra, where the nuances of carnatic music is well understood, now regularly invite Sri Lankan nathaswaram and thavil vidwans to perform regularly at their annual temple functions. P Kumaran,

recently performed as a back-up artist for a famous south Indian movie – Annaatte (அண்ணாத்த) . These are true testaments to the achievements and commitment of this new generation of artists we should all be proud of and cherish. Their services should be marked and every one of them should be respected, cherished and protected by the entire community. Aiding and abetting the distortion of their traditional art form – by over emphasising the role of the genre of music promoted by South Indian cinema for commercial purposes – would not serve the interests of a community whose survival is intimately linked to its age old musical and cultural traditions.

The listening public no doubt has a huge responsibility in protecting the art form. Whilst there is no doubt that the current generation of nathaswaram and thavil Vidwans are as talented as and in many instances technically more versatile than their fore fathers, they are however compelled to respond to the demands of the listening public. It will be a tragedy of monumental proportions, if this traditional art form that has defined the very cultural identity of the Tamil people should over time evolve (or transform) into a form of music that has lost its carnatic/hindustani musical roots and its commitment to devotion (or Bakthi – பக்தி). Whilst we have to accept that every community and every generation has an inalienable right to define their own musical tastes and preferences, it has to be tempered with a sense of responsibility that takes into account the long term needs of a community – including its unique cultural position. The current generation of Tamils – all over the world, are heavily influenced by South Indian cinema and as a result the musical preferences are also reflected by the genre of popular music promoted within South Indian cinema. Whilst many compositions popularised

within Tamil cinema are based on powerful and emotive lyrics and are based on classical Carnatic and Hindustani ragas that are highly suited to be performed at any Nathaswaram concert, an equal number of compositions are better suited for more informal settings and casual parties. Whilst not wishing to curtail the freedom of the artists in any shape or form, it must be emphasised that what is at stake is the very cultural identity of a community, that is still recovering from the effects of a prolonged war that took the entire community to the very brink of destruction. In this context, the nathaswaram/thavil music must retain its position as an elite art form – rooted in centuries of classical and devotional traditions, and not transform itself into an entirely popular form of entertainment based on simple and repetitive rhythmic/lyrical styles.

In concluding this 4 part series of articles on the history of nathaswaram in Sri Lanka – with a particular focus on a selection of the leading proponents, the author is acutely aware that this is merely a snap shot of what is essentially a complex jig saw. There are bound to be omissions of extremely versatile artists who have not been as visible as others in the public space. This by no means undervalues their contributions or the quality and wisdom they have contributed to the wider society through their music. Every one of them had been unique and the wider community owes them a deep sense of gratitude. I hope this series of articles – in English and first of its kind in Sri Lanka will open the interests of a wider cross section of society, to this ancient art form that is deeply rooted in tradition and in many ways epitomises the cultural identity of the Tamil people, wherever they may live.

The End

Jaffna-Trichy...

Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka before civil conflict disrupted air travel between the two regions.

The launch of this route is expected to significantly boost tourism and trade. Trichy, known for its ancient temples and historical landmarks, has long served as a gateway to Tamil Nadu's rich cultural heritage. Additionally, with a large number of Sri Lankan refugees settled in Trichy, the new air route is expected to further strengthen familial connections between the two regions.

However, whether this route will truly benefit businesses remains uncertain, as Jaffna's business community has long raised concerns about the treatment of Sri Lankan travelers at Tamil Nadu airports—particularly in Chennai and Trichy. Many complain that Indian

immigration officers treat most Sri Lankans, particularly those from the North and East, with suspicion, often subjecting them to unnecessary scrutiny and discrimination.

A prominent businessman from Jaffna told Jaffna Monitor that he and his associates have stopped using Chennai and Trichy airports altogether due to repeated mistreatment by immigration officers. Instead, they now prefer traveling via Bengaluru or Hyderabad airports, where they experience less hassle and more professional treatment.

A well-wisher of India in Jaffna told Jaffna Monitor that the Indian government must urgently address this issue, as such treatment could discourage trade and travel, ultimately hindering the full potential of the new Trichy-Jaffna route.



Social Cohesion and the Challenge of Managing a Multi-Ethnic, Plural Sri Lanka

Introduction

Socially cohesive societies are better poised for stability and growth, with a general sense of satisfaction and trust in both inter-community and intra-community relations. These characteristics are a scaffolding for a harmonious society and a prerequisite for both economic success as well as a functioning democracy. Social cohesion is an important determinant of a peaceful, democratic and prosperous nation. It creates stronger bonds within and across different groups, and fosters greater trust in the



BY: **Jeevan Thiagarajah**

Former Governor Northern Province/
Former Member Commissioner
Election Commission.

institutions of government. Reinforcing or promoting social cohesion thus is an integral part of government policy and civil society engagement in countries where multiple identity groups share geographic space. It is even more important where there is a history or current context of conflict, hostility, or mistrust between different identity groups or the state and its citizens as in Sri Lanka.

Targeted population

Across the country, poor citizens, the unbanked, landless, differently abled, seeking Access to Justice, threatened due to religious their beliefs, women seeking access to sustainable means to a livelihood, deriving benefits from conflict sensitive development assistance, included in socially cohesive pluralistic communities without discrimination, benefiting from early intervention preventing violent extremism and protected by state aided services.

Theory of Change

IF communities have increased opportunities to interact meaningfully across divides, including through activities that increase their ability to peacefully conduct livelihoods activities and decrease competition for resources, THEN they will increase inter-group understanding; IF communities have opportunities to address conflict drivers related to access to and management of state services and natural resources, THEN they will be less likely to compete for scarce resources and more likely to live together peacefully. IF communities have an opportunity to share their frustrations and concerns with government officials and other leaders, and if leaders listen and take meaningful action, THEN relationships will improve between communities and leaders, and among leaders. IF formal and informal institutions can

THE GAZETTE OF THE DEMOCRATIC SOCIALIST REPUBLIC OF SRI LANKA

Part II of September 22, 2023

SUPPLEMENT

(Issued on 25.09.2023)



OFFICE FOR NATIONAL UNITY AND
RECONCILIATION

A
BILL

to provide for the establishment of the Office for National Unity and Reconciliation, in order to ensure and promote national unity and reconciliation in Sri Lanka; to set out the powers, duties and functions thereof and to provide for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto

Ordered to be published by the Minister of Justice, Prison Affairs and Constitutional Reforms

PRINTED AT THE DEPARTMENT OF GOVERNMENT PRINTING, SRI LANKA
TO BE PURCHASED AT THE GOVERNMENT PUBLICATIONS BUREAU, COLOMBO 5

Price : Rs. 30.00

Postage : Rs. 150.00



This Gazette Supplement can be downloaded from www.documents.gov.lk

efficiently and effectively respond to the needs of society, THEN people will rely on these institutions rather than resorting to violence. IF security and justice institutions protected everyone and enforced laws equitably and protected all human rights, THEN the extent of core grievance would decline.

The preamble sets out the logic of aiming for a cohesive society in Sri Lanka. It goes onto pick elements from independence to more recent political recommendations.

CEYLON (CONSTITUTION) ORDER
IN COUNCIL [AS AMENDED BY THE
CEYLON CONSTITUTION (AMENDMENT)
ORDER IN COUNCIL, 1947, THE CEYLON
CONSTITUTION (AMENDMENT NO. 2)
ORDER IN COUNCIL, 1947, THE CEYLON
CONSTITUTION (AMENDMENT NO. 3)

ORDER IN COUNCIL, 1947, THE CEYLON INDEPENDENCE ORDER IN COUNCIL, 1047, AND ACTS NOS. 29 OF 1954, 35 OF 1954, AND 36 OF 1954.]

LEGISLATIVE POWERS AND PROCEDURE

Power of Parliament to make laws. 29.

(1) Subject to the provisions of this Order, Parliament shall have power to make laws for the peace, order and good government of the Island.

(2) No such law shall-

(a) prohibit or restrict the free exercise of any religion ; or

(b) make persons of any community or religion liable to disabilities or restrictions to which persons of other communities or religions are not made liable ; or

(c) confer on persons of any community or religion any privilege or advantage which is not conferred on persons of other communities or religions ; or

[2, 29 of 1954.]

(d) alter the constitution of any religious body except with the consent of the governing authority of that body, so, however, that in any case where a religious body is incorporated by law, no such alteration shall be made except at the request of the governing authority of that body :

1957- Bandaranaike - Chelvanayagam Pact
-Recognition of Tamil as a national language, and that the administrative work of the Northern and Eastern Provinces should be done in Tamil. That the Northern Province is to form one regional area whilst the Eastern Province is to be divided into two or more regional areas. Further provision is to be made in the Bill for two or more regions to



collaborate for specific purposes of common interests. The question of M.P.s representing districts falling within regional areas to be eligible to function as chairmen is to be considered. The question of Government Agents being regional commissioners is to be considered. The question of supervisory functions over larger towns, strategic towns and municipalities is to be looked into. Parliament is to delegate powers and to specify them in the Act. It was agreed that regional councils should have powers over specified subjects including agriculture, co-operatives, lands and land development, colonization, education, health, industries and fisheries, housing and social services, electricity, water schemes and roads. Requisite definition of powers will be made in the Bill. It was agreed that in the matter of colonization schemes the powers of the regional councils shall include the power to select allottees to whom lands within their area of authority shall be alienated and also power to select personnel to be employed for work on such schemes. The position regarding the area at present administered by the Gal Oya Board in this matter requires consideration. The Central Government will provide block grants to the regional councils. The principles on which the

grants will be computed will be gone into. The regional councils shall have powers of taxation and borrowing.

1965-Dudley Senanayake - Chelvanayakam Pact - Action will be taken early under the Tamil Language Special Provisions Act to make provision of the Tamil Language to be the language of Administration and of Record in the Northern and Eastern Provinces. Mr.



Senanayake explained that it was the policy of his party that a Tamil-speaking person should be entitled to transact business in Tamil throughout the island. Mr. Senanayake stated that it was the policy of his party to amend the Language of Courts. Act to provide for legal proceedings in the Northern and Eastern Provinces to be conducted and recorded in Tamil. Action will be taken to establish District Councils in Ceylon vested with powers over subjects to be mutually agreed upon between two leaders. It was agreed, however, that the government should have power under the law to give directions to such councils under the national interest. The Land Development Ordinance will be amended to provide that citizens of Ceylon be entitled to the allotment of land under the Ordinance. Mr. Senanayake further agreed that in the granting of land under colonisation schemes the following priorities be observed in the Northern and Eastern provinces:(a) Land in the Northern and Eastern provinces should

in the first instance be granted to landless persons in the district, (b) Secondly, to Tamil-speaking persons resident in the Northern and Eastern provinces, (c) Thirdly, to other citizens in Ceylon, preference being given to Tamil residents in the rest of the island.

The Mangala Moonesinghe Parliamentary Select Committee -The so-called 'Option Paper' presented to the committee by Mr. Moonesinghe proposed the creation of a Northeast Regional Council with specified powers and a single governor. The regional council was to consist of all members of separate Northern and Eastern Provincial



Councils which would sit independently to consider other areas of government. The chief ministers of the respective provinces would alternate as chief minister of the region. While the Option Paper was rejected by the Tamil parties, it was, at least by Sri Lankan standards, a creative attempt to bridge the gap between the various parliamentary parties.

The Interim report of the Moonesinghe select committee -The interim report of the parliamentary select committee was released in January 1993. While the report



was not endorsed by the Tamil parties, it contained the 'matters agreed upon by a majority of members'. These included: 1. the establishment of two separate units of administration for the Northern and Eastern provinces; 2. the adoption of a scheme of devolution on lines similar to those obtaining in the Indian constitution (India's Union Government retains powers to dissolve state assemblies, dismiss state governments and impose presidential rule); 3. The devolution of more powers in List III (Concurrent List) of the 13th amendment, or the wholesale elimination of the List.

The PA Approach -In her address to the nation on 3 August 1995, President Kumaratunga declared: 'The aspiration of the entire Sri Lankan populace is that the current national crisis centred around the north and east be brought to a peaceful, just and honourable settlement ... The first

task is ... a new approach predicated on unqualified acceptance of the fact that the Tamil people have genuine grievances for which solutions must be found. 'With this objective in view, the government is seeking to rebuild the constitutional foundation of a plural society within a united and sovereign Republic of Sri Lanka. This republic will be a Union of Regions. This exercise is based on the following principles: An effective constitutional framework for devolution of power to regions based on credibility, clarity, and an internally consistent and coherent value system, which is capable of effective implementation and includes structures for the just resolution of centre-region disputes; To encourage the regions and communities which inhabit them to become constructive partners of a stable and pluralistic democracy; To ensure that all persons may fully and effectively exercise all their human rights and fundamental freedoms without



any discrimination and in full equality before the law; To give recognition to Sinhala and Tamil as official languages, to accord equality of status to these languages, and to recognize English as a link language; • To protect the identity of distinct communities and create conditions for the promotion of that identity, including the right to enjoy their own culture, profess and practice their own religion, and nurture and promote their own language, and to transact business with the state in the national language of their choice.’

The legal draft was discussed in parliamentary committee for nearly two years, with little prospect of consensus.

In October 1997, the government took a unilateral decision to re-publish its provisions, amended and incorporated in a completely revised draft constitution. Within this new format, the 'foremost place' accorded Buddhism was retained. One constructive feature of the draft constitution was its proposal that the powers of an inter-regional

chief ministers' conference be expanded to mediate disputes not only within regional administrations, but also between the regions and central government. In an attempt to address concerns about the possible abuse of the president's powers to dissolve regional councils, the draft constitution also proposed a specially convened tribunal to adjudicate on the legitimacy of any dissolutions. Such a tribunal would comprise a presidential nominee, a nominee of the regional chief minister concerned and a third member, jointly selected by the two nominees.

In a dramatic swing away from majoritarian centralism, the draft constitution granted the regions veto power over constitutional amendments affecting either the chapter on devolution or the two schedules spelling out regional parameters and the division of powers between different tiers of government.

All Party Representative Committee

(APRC)-2006 -President Rajapaksa convened an All Party Representatives Conference to make recommendations on Constitutional Reform allowing maximum devolution enabling “people in their own localities take charge of the destiny and control their politico-economic environment and social-economic advancement without over- reliance on the Centre”. He also appointed an expert panel to formulate Constitutional reform options that would guide the APRC in its deliberations and recommendations.

Initially twelve members were appointed to the panel. The membership was later increased to fifteen and subsequently to seventeen. Of these eleven endorsed one report described as the “majority” report (was multi – ethnic in composition with six Sinhala, four Tamil and one Muslim representative. All three women experts too had signed it). Four others presented another “minority” report.



Two others submitted a “dissenting” report each. The other three reports were signed by Sinhala persons. While the majority report was ready to propose maximum devolution the other reports were not prepared to go that far. The main issues of contention dividing the majority report and other dissenting reports were over matters like maximum devolution amounting to quasi – federalism, unitary state and retaining the salient points of the 13th Constitutional amendment.

The majority report recommended that Sri Lanka should be known as “Republic of Sri Lanka” without specifying whether it should be unitary or federal. The majority report proposed four different options in resolving the prickly issue of North – East linkage. Among other recommendations were proposals for power sharing at the centre, resolution of centre-province disputes and specific measures to ensure territorial integrity and prevent secession. The majority

report recommended that Local Government be constitutionally recognized as a tier of government.

India showed keen interest in the working of the Expert panel and provided much documentation including the Sarkaria Commission report on Centre – State relations it is known. The APRC had representatives from the Sri Lanka Freedom Party, United National Party, Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna, Jathika Hela Urumaya , Sri Lanka Muslim Congress, National Unity Alliance, Ceylon Workers Congress, Mahajana Eksath Peramuna Lanka Sama Samaja Party, Communist Party of Sri Lanka, All Ceylon Muslim League, and Eelam Peoples Democratic Party. National Muslim Congress, Up Country People’s Front and Western Peoples Front (now DPF).

The inability of the Expert panel to define a framework of fundamental values for resolving the national problems and present a coherent set of options in respect of the key issues was a missed opportunity.

Highlights of the Majority Committee Report: Sri Lanka will not be defined as unitary or federal. 2. Every one of the constituent peoples of Sri Lanka will have the right to internal self-determination. 3. The Constitution will have a comprehensive Bill of Rights. Group rights will be recognized. Section 29(2) of the Soulbury Constitution will be included. 4. Powers will be devolved on Provinces which will be the units of devolution. There will be Provincial Legislatures and Provincial Governments. 5. Four options have been given with regard to the issue of the merger of the North and East to a single Province. One option is for a permanent merger with internally autonomous units for Muslim and Sinhala minorities. Another option is for a temporary merger with a referendum in the East at the



end of 10 years. 6. The Tamils of Indian origin will have an internally autonomous Zonal Council within the Central Province and a Cultural Council recognised by the Constitution. 7. There will be 4 Lists for the assignment of subjects and functions, namely, National, Provincial, Concurrent and Local Authorities. The subjects in the Concurrent List will be deemed to be Provincial subjects for the North-East while the other Provinces will be able to have them as concurrent at the outset and gradually make claims to convert them to provincial subjects. 8. Sri Lanka will have a President and two Vice Presidents, each belonging to a different community. 9. There will be a Senate with the Senators elected by the Provincial Legislatures. One of the Vice Presidents will be the Chairman of the Senate. 10. Sinhala and Tamil will have parity of status as the official languages of Sri Lanka. Sinhala, Tamil and English shall be the national languages of Sri Lanka. All three national languages could be the medium of instruction in schools and in universities. 11. The Provinces will have powers over state land. 12. The Provinces will have their own Police Forces. 13. The Provinces will have substantial fiscal powers, including the

powers to have access to international finances. 14. The public service will be restructured so as to make devolution of powers to be effective. 15. There will be a Constitutional Court outside the judicial hierarchy. This Court will adjudicate on matters of interpretation of the Constitution, and the legality of laws before or after enactment. The Court will also adjudicate on executive actions of the President.

Conclusions

In the absence of armed civil strife of the kind seen up to May 2009 there may be little political incentive for parties at the centre to recognise and or go the extent seen in the past as proposals for accommodation of diverse segments of society. However, the Foreign Minister was heard to say in his recent address to 58th UNHRC Session in Geneva, 'Special attention has been paid to improving the socio-economic conditions and address critical needs such as resettlement, housing, compensation and infrastructure development in the conflict-affected Northern and Eastern Provinces. The Government has been actively working to develop infrastructure, support livelihoods and promote industries in the Northern and Eastern Provinces, aiming to enhance connectivity and support regional development. The Government led by President Anura Kumara Dissanayake is firmly and sincerely committed to working towards a unified Sri Lanka that respects and celebrates the diversity of its people with no division or discrimination based on race, religion, class and caste. We will not leave room for a resurgence of divisive racism or religious extremism in our country. Every citizen should feel free to practice their religion, speak their language, and live according to their cultural values without fear



or discrimination. No one should feel that their beliefs, culture, or political affiliations will make them targets of undue pressure or prejudice. Administrative, political and electoral processes will be activated towards this end. Domestic institutions such as the Office on Missing Persons (OMP), Office for Reparations, and Office for National Unity and Reconciliation (ONUR) will be strengthened. The contours of a truth and reconciliation framework, will be further discussed with the broadest possible cross section of stakeholders, before operationalization to ensure a process that has the trust of all Sri Lankans. Our aim is to make the domestic mechanisms credible and sound within the constitutional framework. This will include strengthening

the work towards a truth and reconciliation commission empowered to investigate acts of violence caused by racism and religious extremism that give rise to tensions within Sri Lankan society’.

Much of what he has said have echoes with the past. Clearly the need has been long felt extending to beyond our pre independence period. Going forward there is need to ensure we have no recurrence of issues past leading to strife. The Government is well placed at present to set in place measures which prevent relapse of conflict or emergence of extremism. The menu of options drawing from historical narratives on the table to use is rich.



ONE WAY

Translated from the original Tamil short story *“One Way”* by **Shobasakthi**

Translated by:
Eḷuttukkiṇiyavan
(எழுத்துக்கினியவன்)

It is a deeply held superstition among the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora in Europe that an early morning call from Sri Lanka brings news of a death. Therefore, I always went to sleep with my cellphone turned off. Just as we do archana in temples or conduct witchcraft cleansing in the hope of postponing the death of our loved ones, I developed the belief that turning off the cellphone would prevent death. A year ago, on just one

night, I forgot to turn off my cell phone before I went to bed. At four in the morning, it woke me up with a scream to convey news of appā's death.

Appā was a man of warped thinking. My mother, who was filled to the brim with naivete, was like a hostage caught in the tentacles of a crazed extremist. But if I even frowned at appā or exchanged words with him, my ammā would rush to his defense. She would berate me, claiming that her husband possessed a treasured intellect and fearless bravery.

When they got married, appā had taken ammā to see the movie 'anpē vā.' During the interval, a young man in the movie theater had smiled at ammā. Since he was in her class till grade 5 – ammā went to school only till grade 5 –, she had smiled back. Noticing this, appā had dragged ammā out of the theater, gave her a thundering slap in the middle of the street, and demanded to know who the man was. If this incident had ended then and there, I would have no need to tell you the story now. But even when he was eighty-one, just a few days before his death, he had slapped her, asking, "Who was it that grinned at you in the theater?" For fifty years, appā had been posing this question to her whenever it crossed his mind.

Despite his warped thinking, there is no doubt that he was effective at what he did. He traveled between Jaffna and Colombo for his tobacco brokerage business, slowly but steadily raising the economic status of our family. There were rumors that he engaged in some sort of fraud in his brokerage business. Even some lawsuits found their way to us. He bought a big empty plot of land in the middle of the village, turned it into a luscious coconut grove, and built a house. His first four children were girls. He had frugally saved enough

money to marry them off. With his efforts and the natural beauty, they inherited from ammā, my sisters were quickly snapped up by grooms from abroad. My eldest sister Thilakā went to France and arranged a groom for my second elder sister Rōhiṇi. Their entire household was abuzz with celebrations to send her off to France. It was then that I ran away to join a militant group, turning the festive household into looking like a funerary one. My appā never forgave me for this misdeed.

When my youngest sister Vēṇi was leaving for France to get married, I was in prison. Vēṇi akkā came with ammā to visit me in Magazine prison before flying out. In those days, I could never even imagine being released from prison. Everyone said I would be sentenced to at least thirty years in prison. Did I not mention appā's warped thinking? He did not visit me in prison even once. Once in a while ammā traveled from the village to see me, accompanied by some relative or the other.

Perhaps it was because of all the vows she made to deities in temple after temple, or perhaps it was because of the endless fasting she suffered through, I was released after seven years. As soon as I was released, my four sisters pooled money to pay for an agent to smuggle me into France. Once I arrived in France, they all told me in unison:

"Brother! We paid for your lawsuit for seven years. Now we have even brought you out of the country. We are not going to ask you to pay back all that money. But from now on, taking care of our parents is your responsibility."

I came to France at twenty-seven years of age after souring on the militant movement and the Tamil struggle. While I was in prison, my militant group completely abandoned me. It was my family that protected me and rescued



me from prison. I resolved to spend the rest of my life for the welfare of my family and began to work hard.

Five years after I came to France, I had saved enough money to pay for an agent to bring my parents to France. My sisters were also very keen to bring them over. But my appā, he of warped thinking, refused to move abroad. He declared firmly, “I cannot live a debased refugee life like you all. If you want, you can take your ammā abroad!” There is no need to

explain that ammā would never travel alone without appā. It was with the savings intended to bring them that I paid an agent to bring my cousin Sevvanthi to France and married her. That was the only smart thing that I ever did in my entire life. In marriage ceremonies, people vow to never part ‘in sickness and in health’ as a mere formality. But my cousin Sevvanthi has stuck religiously to the letter and spirit of that vow.

When appā died some distant relative

had to light his pyre. Those of us who had the obligation to light his pyre, I and my sisters, were living as refugees in France. We no longer had Sri Lankan passports. The temporary refugee passports given to us by the French government explicitly said <Not permitted to travel to Sri Lanka>. Even after siring five children, appā died like an abandoned old man with no offspring. Ammā was now eighty. Various maladies, the inevitable fruits of old age, had taken her over completely. Anxious that the same fate as appā's would befall ammā, I turned off my cell phone at night before going to bed.

But bad news found its way to me during the day. My eldest sister called me on my cellphone to say that ammā had been admitted to the General Hospital in Jaffna after being bitten by a snake that was hiding inside a pot. I called ammā's cell phone immediately. The first thing ammā told me from her hospital bed was that I should bring her over to France.

We the children had begun to ponder this possibility right after appā passed away. But the various practical difficulties involved had stopped us on our tracks. It had remained a mere possibility. But now ammā herself requested it explicitly. Tell me, how can my uneducated ammā, not wise in the ways of the world, comprehend the practical difficulties that you yourself would struggle to understand fully!

We as refugees cannot sponsor her to come to France. The only way left to us was to use an agent to bring her here illegally. There was no other way. But how could we subject ammā to an illegal journey at her advanced age? She would need to cross icy deserts and frozen rivers on foot. Or she would need to travel by air on a stolen passport or a fake visa. If she got caught en route, she would be thrown into prison. My eldest brother-in-law made

a suggestion. Let us try for a tourist visa for ammā. If she gets it, she could travel to France and then register as a refugee.

Since I had been given the entire responsibility for taking care of ammā, I made all the necessary arrangements. Once ammā had recovered, she went to Colombo with an acquaintance and applied for a tourist visa at the French embassy. At the interview, the embassy visa officer had asked just one question:

“You are a senior. I don't want to waste your time by making you run around. We can give you a three-month visa. But what guarantee is there that you would return to Sri Lanka after three months?”

I had anticipated this question. Therefore, I had warned ammā about it before the interview. Therefore, ammā responded to the question saying, “I have land and a house in my village. I would not overstay in France, abandoning them.”

The visa officer countered, “Lots of houses and land lie abandoned in Jaffna district. Their owners went to Canada and Europe but never returned,” and rejected ammā's application for a visa.

My reaction to the rejection was to be furious at ammā. If appā and ammā had agreed to come to France fifteen years ago, when I first invited them, it would have been perfect. Then ammā had the strength to undertake a journey that involved crossing borders illegally. It was also not difficult to come here. A lot of people boarded planes in Colombo holding fake visas arranged by agents and requested political asylum as soon as they landed in Paris airport. At that time, France was accepting refugees without too much of a fuss because the civil war was raging in Sri Lanka. Now the civil

war has ended. Ripe old age and ill health has taken over ammā. She takes fifteen different tablets every day. How many more years could she survive the cold and snow in France? Even the banana tree that rejuvenates itself like a Phoenix every time it is cut down, could not survive in France's climate. The Sri Lankan sun and the life in harmony with nature would give ammā a long life. I found different reasons to be angry, as a defense mechanism to deal with my inferiority complex arising from my inability to do anything for ammā.

But ammā was firm in her desire to come to France. I really could not challenge any of the reasons she had for this desire.

“Listen carefully son! This village has been a wasteland for years. Snakes and creepy crawlies and rabid dogs rule the roost here. Every house in the village, save barely ten, lies in a dilapidated state. People who escaped the village during the war never returned. There is no one within a half-a-kilometer radius of our house. There is no electricity at night, only occasionally during the day. How can a sick old woman like me live here alone? An old woman who lived on the east street alone like me was strangled to death by burglars. No one knows if they were petty thieves, or people from the Ava group, or army, or navy. There isn't a huge distance between the east street and the west street, is there? Anything can happen to me at any time.”

“Why don't you go stay with some relatives for some time, ammā?”

“Where can I go? Your appā had made enemies of everyone before he departed this world. But it must be said that he never started a fight himself. But even if I went to live with some relatives, do you think they would take good care of me? They would be out to fleece money from me, son! This is not the Sri Lanka

you left. Everyone is focused on money from abroad.”

“It is difficult to come here now ammā. They have tightened the rules. You have also become old.”

“That is no problem. Just last month, Sellaiyā's wife was taken to Canada by her children. She is two years older than me. She moved around in a wheelchair. I still have strength in both my legs. I draw water from the well all by myself. I collect coconuts from the yard. When rainwater floods into the house, I am the one who empties the water by myself using a coconut shell. I catch a bus to travel to the General Hospital ten miles away. But how much longer can I live alone, son? I have fifteen grandchildren. My corpse would not even burn if I die without touching the face of even one of them. Will you come to light my pyre?”

My sisters were unanimous in siding with ammā.

“Brother! Until now ammā had never asked us for even a single Euro. She did not extravagantly spend the money that we did send but saved it by living frugally. If we cannot fulfill her wish at the evening of her life, we don't deserve to be her children. Brother... if you are short of money, we will give you money. Don't worry that you will be burdened with taking care of her once she arrives here. We are her four daughters. We will not let her daughter-in-law bear the burden of taking care of her.”

I was angered even more listening to my sisters talk as if I was the one placing roadblocks on ammā's way to France. Incensed, I started looking for an agent that very day. Kailāsanāthan, who works in the same natural food market as me, came forward

to help. He introduced me by phone to a friend of his in Colombo who works as an agent for migrants. Even though the agent demanded a large fee, I agreed to it. It was to be a trip by air. I was required to pay half the fee up front and the remaining half once ammā landed in France. I did not want to borrow even a cent from my sisters. I emptied my bank account to pay the deposit. For the rest, we would use Sevvanthi's jewelry.

Within a week of receiving the money, the agent took ammā to Delhi. He prepared an Indian passport she could travel to France on. He craftily inserted her into a group of elderly Indians going on a tour of France. But the airport authorities in Delhi thwarted this trick with an old simple counter trick. They had asked ammā to count from one to ten with her fingers. She had done so by folding finger after finger. Apparently, when Indians count, they open finger after finger, instead of folding them like us. Therefore, the authorities easily concluded that ammā was not Indian.

When the agent reluctantly revealed to me over the phone that ammā had been sent to the immigration prison in Delhi, I cursed him out with the choicest obscenities. Just think! An eighty-year-old lady being imprisoned in a country where she did not even speak the local language. Are you not more infuriated than I am! I did not let my sisters know that ammā was in prison. They would not be able to bear this news. All their sorrow will turn into anger at me for making a careless mistake with her travel arrangements.

The full force of my anger turned to Kailāsanāthan who had introduced the idiot agent to me. Having volunteered to help me, he was forced into a situation of having had to listen to a mouthful of abuse from me. But that kindhearted man understood my worry and anger and started harrying the idiot agent.

Within five days, ammā was released from prison. When she called me on the phone, I could not help weeping. The idiot agent suggested that he could try once again via Mumbai airport. "Forget it! Take ammā safely back to the village," I said. In that case, he said he could not return the 50% advance he had received. I responded, "That is fine, I don't want that money back! It is enough for me if you take ammā safely back to Sri Lanka."

The following week, ammā called me on the phone from Sri Lanka.

"Son! It looks like it is difficult to travel via India. Now they are showing on TV that people travel to France via Ukraine..."

"Ammā! There is a war raging in Ukraine," I said.

"That is ok, son. I have seen enough war in my life! Don't fret for nothing. They would not do anything to an old woman who could die any day now," said ammā.

She called me every day on WhatsApp to talk. She repeated many times that she could not stay on in Sri Lanka for even a minute more. "What is the point of having money? Groceries are hard to find! People here are going to die of starvation. We are forced to eat the spinach that grows on garbage piles, and the rice paste that the Chinese are donating," she wailed. How could we children have the heart to eat even a mouthful after listening to a lament like this?

I could not focus properly on my work at my natural food market. I kept thinking about ammā. Would she die of her unfulfilled desire to move to France? My head was in turmoil. My Jewish boss noticed my disquiet. He called me over to tell me that there was an order from

the old lady Olymp and asked me to collect all the items on her grocery list and deliver them. Usually, I would be excited at making a delivery to Olymp. Although I did not have the same excitement this time, the prospect of visiting Olymp did bring some peace of mind.

When I joined this Jewish natural food market two years ago, my first job was to take groceries in a cart to Olymp's house for delivery. Her house was not far away. The old house was on a small plot of land just opposite the tram stop where I usually get off on my way to work.

Olymp was born to French-Corsican parents. She was about the same age as my ammā. Like ammā, she, too, lived alone. Although she was of average height, her back was bent, which made her look rather short. She had a dusting of facial hair, and a small bald patch on the top of her head. Old lady Olymp rarely ventured outside her house. She had a degree in psychology. Her house was full of thick hardcover books with black covers.

On the very first day I went to her house, the lady looked at me with her gray eyes shining and invited me to come inside her house and sit down.

“Handsome young man! Are you Sri Lankan?”

“Yes... madame,” I said.

Thereafter, every time I went to her house to make a delivery, the old lady told me this story little by little:

“Yes son! It was only a few years after the second world war. France was starting to flourish again after being liberated from the Nazis. Our family lived in this house even then. My father had died in the war. My mother had befriended a rough Greek fellow. I

was thirteen years old.

A Sri Lankan family came from somewhere to settle down in this village. I don't know if it was a Sinhala family or a Tamil family or a mixed one. There was a young boy in that family, close to my age. He joined our school. At the beginning, he didn't know a word of French, but could speak a bit of Portuguese, which I could understand somewhat. His name was Thomas.

Very quickly I fell in love with that shy, young, brown man. Then this was a tiny village. The woods were full of flowers. Unlike now, there was a lot of water in the river. Horses would graze quietly in the meadows. Thomas and I would play in the woods and on the river. Shall I tell you something interesting? Thomas didn't even know how to kiss. I taught him that.

When my mother found out about our relationship, she scolded me strongly. Her Greek lover beat me brutally. But I did not stop seeing Thomas. But one day, the entire Sri Lankan family disappeared from this village. I could never forget that relationship which lasted barely two months. I harbored the idiotic notion that one day I would travel to Sri Lanka. This old woman does not need to hide that from you, son!”

There were many books, pictures, statues, masks, and maps about Sri Lanka in her house. She had read a lot about Sri Lanka from books. She told me that it made her very happy to talk to me. But it did not make my boss very happy that I spent time in Olymp's house without promptly returning back to the shop after making the delivery.

One day, I invited Olymp to my house and served her a variety of Sri Lankan dishes. Even though the spiciness made her eyes



water, she enjoyed the food and finished it without leaving anything behind on her plate. It was a French habit.

“Madame... I will take you to Sri Lanka one day,” I told her frequently. She would smile like a child. Olymp did not know that I myself did not have the ability to visit Sri Lanka.

The first question Olymp asked me when I entered her house with my pushcart was, “Is your mother in Sri Lanka well? I read in

the newspaper that people had occupied the presidential palace in Colombo, and there were protests and scuffles all over the country. Is there any problem in your village?”

I will tell you the truth! The moment Olymp said ‘problem,’ an idea suddenly lit up brightly in my mind. While there was a fierce battle in my mind as to whether I should tell Olymp about this idea, my pitiful tongue spoke up:

“Madame, would you be able to do me a

favor?”

“Tell me son! I will definitely help!”

“The situation in Sri Lanka is not very good now. Famine is spreading. There is a shortage of medicines, too. I would like to bring my sick mother over to France so that she could live with me for a while, Madame...”

“Yes, you should certainly do it, son. How can I help you?”

“If you can give my mother a sponsor letter, I think they would issue her a visa...”

“Is that all! Just assume that your mother is already here! Tell her to get ready for the trip. I will go to the town council office right this minute to start the paperwork and get all the documentation needed for the sponsorship. Come to see me in the evening after work.”

I was speechless with gratitude. When she saw my eyes moisten, she came over with a childlike smile to hug me.

While I was at work at the market, Olymp called me on the phone from the town council office. She asked me details like ammā’s name, address, and date of birth.

I went to her house that evening with a thousand questions racing in my mind. She sat me down at her reading desk and gave me five neatly folded documents.

“Listen son! The first document is the approval from the town council for me to invite your mother here on a three-month tourist visa. The second has details of my bank account. The third is a copy of my French national identity card. The fourth is the letter from me to your mother inviting her here as my guest. The fifth is unnecessary... but they told me at the

town council that it is the most important one. It is my consent to let the Interior Ministry begin legal proceedings against me if my guest didn’t leave France within three months. If your mother takes these documents to the French embassy in Colombo and submits a visa application, they would definitely grant her a visa. I am very eager to meet your mother. I will come to see her myself!”

Each of the five documents had a scribbled signature by Olymp’s shaky hand.

Even a scribbled French signature carries weight, does it not! Within ten days of applying for a visa at the French embassy in Colombo, she was granted a three-month visitor visa. When my sisters heard the news, they were exhilarated, and could not stop kissing me over the phone. Thereafter, they started a fierce competition among themselves to decide in whose house ammā was going to live. As usual, my third sister Malar, who is stubborn and never yields an inch, won.

While they were rejoicing, my heart was in turmoil. My ammā would definitely have to leave France after three months. She would need to leave her five children and fifteen grandchildren to return alone to Sri Lanka. But I did not have the courage to tell her this. It would certainly spoil her joy at the prospect of finally being able to come to France. I thought I could gently tell her once she arrives in France and convince her to return within three months. There was another possibility. The impending harsh winter, the cooped-up apartment-living here, and the habit of keeping cooked food in the fridge for a week to eat reheated food every day could all make ammā weary enough to want to return to Sri Lanka. Having lived here for twenty years, even my own heart yearns to return to Sri Lanka. If ammā, too, develops such a yearning and chooses to return to Sri Lanka,



then the problem would be solved amicably. Perhaps she could pass on in peace, and her body would turn to dust in our own village cemetery with the satisfaction of having seen her grandchildren.

The third day after ammā's arrival in France, I took Olymp to Malar akkā's house. Olymp, who came with a bouquet of mimosa flowers, held ammā's hand all the time until she left. All four of my sisters were there. Even though they all welcomed Olymp cheerfully, they exchanged glances among them as if to

indicate that she was an unwanted guest.

One day, ammā told me:

“Son! There is no one back home to look after our house and land. Before some neighbor tries to take them over with fake deeds, we should sell the house. It won't fetch much. In that largely abandoned village, a third of a hectare of land would barely fetch one lakh rupees. A missionary group has been asking to buy the house and land. We should sort out the paperwork to sell them soon.”

“Ammā... that was the house we all grew up in. That is the only identity we have left in Sri Lanka. Let us leave it be....”

“So, what! None of us are returning to Sri Lanka. Did your appā gain all that wealth for thieves to enjoy? Get on with selling it, son.”

I did not imagine that ammā would come to like France so much. She enjoyed the snow and cold like a little child. Once when I visited Malar akkā, she was sitting on the carpet learning French from her granddaughter.

“Ammā! Don’t sit on the floor... you would be cold,” I said.

“Chī chī.. I think this cold is just the right medicine for my maladies. Since I came here, I have not caught a cold or had a fever... one should learn the language of the land one plans to live in, son. That is why I have started to learn French. Your appā was able to go all the way to Colombo to succeed in business because he knew Sinhala,” she said.

Two-and-a-half months had passed since ammā came to France. Even though she was based in Malar akkā’s house, she did the rounds among the homes of the other children, spending a couple of days in each. In between, my eldest sister and her family took ammā to Lourdes. Ammā toured Paris and its suburbs visiting all the Hindu temples. After going to the riverbank to play with the grandchildren, she marveled, “Chchā, what a wonderful country! Is there even a single bug, or creepy crawly or snake?” From time to time, she reminded me that we ought to sell the house and land in the village.

When barely two weeks were left before ammā’s visa was to expire, I called my eldest sister on the phone and said:

“Periyakkā... you are the one to gently tell ammā that she needs to return to Sri Lanka on the thirtieth.”

“Thambi.. What crazy talk is this? After all the trouble we went through to bring her here, should we send her back? What would this woman do in Sri Lanka? She will only be alive for another year or two. Let her live here. You don’t have to struggle anymore. I will take care of everything that needs to be done. The day after the visa expires, I will take her to the Police to register her as a refugee.”

“Akkā, did I not tell you already? We cannot do that. If she does not return, Olymp, who sponsored her, will be in legal jeopardy.”

“Olymp and Polymp! If that old woman wants money, we can give her some. But we cannot send ammā back to Sri Lanka.”

“Look here Periyakkā... Olymp did not do it for money. She did it out of love and the trust she had in us. She is older than ammā. How can we put her in a situation where she had to go to the courts? She might even be sent to prison..”

“Don’t be crazy, thambi. How many people come here as sponsored visitors but remain behind seeking asylum. Has there ever been a problem? Nothing you fear will come to pass.”

“No Periyakkā... I cannot breach the confidence Olymp placed in me. Ammā must return back.”

I called my third sister Malar on the phone. Before that my eldest sister had called Malar and apprised her of the situation. True to her nature, Malar barked at me as soon as I called:

“Is that so! Is that how it is! Let’s see how you

are going to send my ammā back. I would take her passport right away and burn it,” she said haughtily.

“You cannot, Malar akkā... ammā’s passport is with me.”

“You have shown your true militant group brain, thambi. This old white woman has become more important to you than our own ammā! Please don’t tell ammā that she has to go back home. She will die of anguish right this minute. Don’t bear that burden!

But in the end, I had to bear a burden. For a week, there was no grocery order from Olymp. I did not have the courage to go over to her house to see if everything was all right. Ammā’s visa problem took a heavy toll on me. One day, when I was returning home, I noticed that Olymp’s front door was padlocked from the outside. Flyers that had been stuck into the gaps between the door frame and the door were hanging clumsily. How did I miss noticing this when I saw her house every day from this tram stop? I realized that some sort of guilty conscience had unconsciously entered me; dirty saliva of guilt pooled within my mouth. I spat it out, crossed the street and rang Olymp’s neighbor’s doorbell. I was somewhat familiar with her Italian neighbor. I delivered his groceries, too.

The Italian neighbor said that Olymp had had breathing difficulties and was admitted to the Central Hospital. I went back to the tram stop and started waiting for my tram back home. A thousand thoughts materialized within my brain like black ants and started busily running around.

On the way home, when the tram stopped at the Central Hospital station, my legs involuntarily got off the tram. I walked as if I had consumed a kilo of narcotics. When I

stood listlessly in front of the reception, the receptionist may have mistaken me for a patient. I asked her for Olymp’s room number and walked up the stairs to Olymp’s, without even taking the elevator. The truth was that I was trying to postpone as much as possible the moment I would have to confront Olymp.

Olymp was lying on the hospital bed with her eyes closed. There was an oxygen mask covering her face. She looked like a still doll in her knee-length blue hospital gown. When I asked the head nurse about Olymp’s situation, she said mechanically, “This lady’s health has been deteriorating steadily... We cannot say anything with certainty about her health.” I sensed that my soul that had been restless until that point, was gradually calming down. Once again, guilty saliva secreted copiously within my mouth. Until I reached home, I resisted the temptation to spit it out

Before I could step into the house, my youngest sister Vēṇi called. I spoke with my mouth full of saliva.

She asked, “What is this thambi.. Are you really going to send ammā back home?”

I am not sure if she understood what I meant when I responded, “We cannot say anything with certainty.”

For the next four days, I went to the hospital every day without fail to visit Olymp. She lay still like a log, with her eyes closed. Because I went there every day at the same time, the nurse became acquainted with me. When she said no one else came to visit Olymp, I thought of my ammā.

My ammā never returned to Sri Lanka.

Support for Jaffna Monitor: A Grateful Acknowledgment

In the November 1, 2024 issue of Jaffna Monitor, we made our first public appeal for donations to sustain and strengthen the magazine. We are deeply grateful for the contributions received so far.

- **Well-wisher of Jaffna Monitor, Canada** – Rs. 100,000
- **Well-wisher of Jaffna Monitor, Canada** – Rs. 25,000
- **Health Orbit Inc., UK** – Rs. 108,000
- **Satha & Satha Associates, UK** – Rs. 50,000
- **Well-wisher of Jaffna Monitor, UK** – Rs. 50,000
- **Saraswathy Rajagopal, Malaysia** – Rs. 22,700
- **Well-wisher of Jaffna Monitor, Srilanka** – Rs. 5,000

Total Donations Received: Rs. 360,700

The donations we receive are deeply valued, but they are not yet enough to fully sustain our work. We sincerely look forward to more support from our readers and well-wishers.

However, we want to make it clear—donations do not grant any influence over our editorial content. We cannot and will not write even a single word under obligation. Our commitment is to independent journalism, and our integrity is non-negotiable. If you respect this principle and still wish to support us, we encourage you to donate.

For those who wish to contribute, donations can be made to our official bank account. Please find our bank details below:

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

Thank you for being a part of our journey!

CONTACT US

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

Email : hellojaffnamonitor@gmail.com

Phone : +94715418220

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

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