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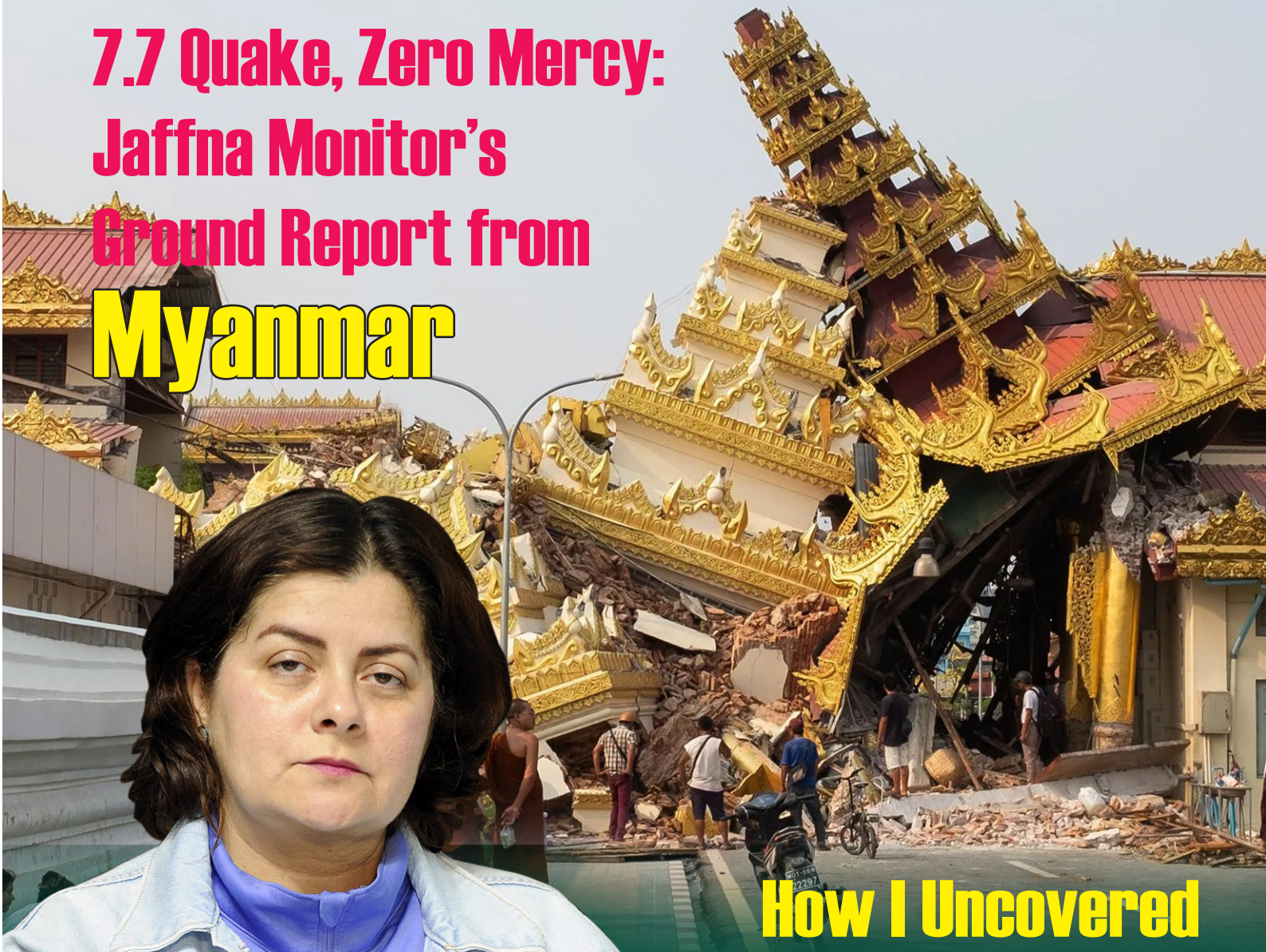
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7.7 Quake, Zero Mercy: Jaffna Monitor's Ground Report from Myanmar



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Jaffna Monitor's Exclusive
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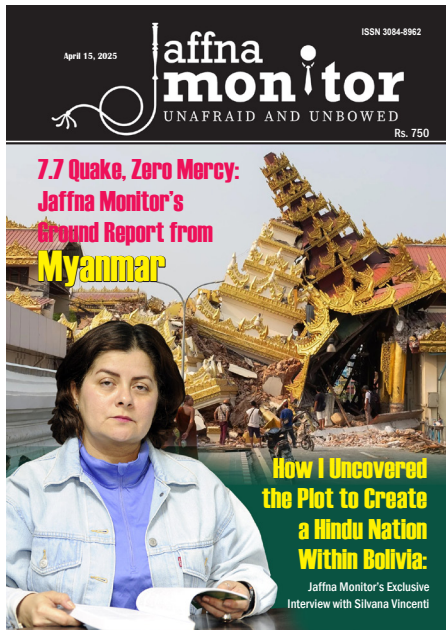
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Pragmatism over Dogma: The JVP's Rebirth in a Realist World



There's a meme doing the rounds on Facebook about Modi's recent visit:

During his visit to Sri Lanka, the Indian Prime Minister, seated in a car with his host, President Anura Kumara Disسانayake, looked around with mild confusion and said: "This is my fourth visit to Sri Lanka. Every time I came before, there were always crowds of angry people in black shirts, waving black flags and shouting anti-Indian slogans—accusing us of expansionism and imperialism. But this time... not a single protester in sight. Have they changed their view of India? Or... did we just take a different route?"

To this, Anura Kumara grinned and replied: "We were those guys. Now we're running the country. We know we can't go around antagonising a regional superpower anymore."

Sri Lanka witnessed a once-in-a-lifetime reception for a foreign leader during the recent visit of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Beyond the optics, the two countries signed several key agreements—including a landmark defence cooperation pact that previous governments had either hesitated to pursue or outright avoided.

It's almost amusing—and at the same time, commendable for its pragmatism—to see how far the JVP has come. Once a party that gained traction largely through its strong anti-Indian rhetoric, it now leads a government under the NPP banner that is pragmatic enough to understand the real demands of governance.

Anura Kumara Disسانayake and the JVP's powerful decision-making Politburo have clearly realized that you can't govern a country like Zelensky's Ukraine or Hamas's Gaza—through constant confrontation, idealistic defiance, or by antagonizing

global superpowers. This world belongs to pragmatists, not to mythical warrior-kings who ride into battle driven by rigid belief systems, only to fall with arrows in their chests.

From Anti-India Firebrand to Pragmatic Partner: JVP's Political Evolution

The JVP was born as a Marxist-Leninist revolutionary movement, the brainchild of Rohana Wijeweera—a Moscow-educated medical student who was more of a firebrand agitator than a pragmatic ideologue. Both he and the JVP were ideologically shaped by global leftist currents, drawing inspiration from figures like Mao Zedong, Vladimir Lenin, Che Guevara, and other revolutionary thinkers. In its early years, the JVP embraced class struggle, militant activism, and a staunch opposition to the prevailing political and economic order.

Its first uprising in 1971, though amateurish in organization, was a radical experiment led by idealistic and inexperienced youth. Despite its limited military success, the rebellion shook the nation—primarily because of the state's brutal crackdown, which resulted in the deaths of thousands.

By the late 1980s, as New Delhi deepened its involvement in Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict—particularly through its support to Tamil militant groups and the eventual signing of the Indo-Lanka Accord—the JVP re-emerged with renewed vigor and a new target for its revolutionary ire: India.

With the signing of the Indo-Lanka Accord in 1987, Rohana Wijeweera and his comrades no longer viewed India as a benign neighbor but as a neo-imperialist power intent on undermining Sri Lankan sovereignty.

JVP propaganda during this period portrayed India as a regional bully—an "expansionist" force not unlike Western imperialists. The party's literature, public speeches, and posters accused India of plotting to turn Sri Lanka into a client state. This anti-Indian narrative became deeply institutionalized within the movement.

Oaths reportedly taken by JVP recruits at the time allegedly included a vow to "resist all forms of foreign intervention, especially Indian expansionism." One of the JVP's foundational 'Five Lectures,' delivered by Wijeweera himself, was dedicated entirely to the threat of Indian imperialism, emphasizing the belief that India aimed to undermine Sri Lanka's sovereignty.

Wijeweera, known for his fiery speeches, once declared: "India is not helping Sri Lanka out of goodwill. Its long-term plan is to divide and dominate us." This anti-India sentiment wasn't just part of the party's internal discourse—it shaped its propaganda, recruitment, and actions during the height of its second insurrection.

Fiery Rebellion and Anti-Indian Rhetoric in the 1980s

The Indo-Lanka Peace Accord of 1987—an agreement that brought the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) into Sri Lanka and introduced devolution through the 13th Amendment—was, to the JVP, nothing short of an Indian invasion cloaked in diplomacy. The party erupted in fury, launching street agitations, incendiary propaganda, and a campaign of targeted violence to resist what it perceived as a betrayal by Colombo and the imposition of a "Delhi diktat."

Rohana Wijeweera publicly denounced the

presence of Indian troops, declaring them an “occupying army” sent not to preserve peace but to “subdue the will of the Sri Lankan people.” He warned that unless Sri Lankans resisted, the island risked becoming “another province of India”—a satellite state with its sovereignty quietly extinguished.

Such rhetoric resonated deeply with segments of the Sinhala nationalist base, who were already wary of India’s intentions. The JVP skillfully tapped into this resentment, converting popular frustration into a militant uprising. Between 1987 and 1989, the party launched a full-blown insurrection, marked by assassinations, sabotage, and open confrontation with the state—a conflict that resulted in the deaths of tens of thousands of Sri Lankans on both sides.

In justifying the turn to armed rebellion, Wijeweera framed it as a last resort. “When the state surrenders the nation to foreign powers,” he argued, “it becomes not only our right but our duty to take up arms in defense of the motherland.”

The JVP began targeting individuals they accused of collaborating with India—branding them as traitors. In response, the Sri Lankan government unleashed a brutal counter-insurgency campaign, targeting not only active JVP members but also suspected sympathizers and even those who merely expressed mild dissent.

Scores of people—mostly young men and women—were killed by both sides in an orgy of violence. This tragic scenario is perhaps best captured by the words of the legendary writer Khushwant Singh in his novel *Train to Pakistan*: “In truth, both sides killed. Both shot and stabbed and speared and clubbed. Both tortured. Both raped.” His words, though written about another time and place,

hauntingly echo the Sri Lankan experience during the JVP insurrection.

The same JVP-led government that now champions the rule of law and justice has arrested former Eastern Province Chief Minister Sivanesanathurai Chandrakanthan—better known as Pillayan—in connection with the 2006 abduction and suspected murder of Professor S. Raveendranath, then Vice Chancellor of Eastern University. The case, still unresolved after 18 years, remains one of the darkest chapters in Sri Lanka’s academic history. If Pillayan is guilty, justice must be served—without hesitation, without compromise.

But here’s the bitter irony: Pillayan stands accused of a murder 18 years ago. Yet the JVP itself committed murders 18 years before that. In the blood-soaked late 1980s, it was the JVP that gunned down scholars, vice chancellors, and teachers. It was the JVP that pioneered the systematic targeting of intellectuals, branding those who refused to bow to their radical ideology as “traitors,” and executing them with cold precision.

Among their first victims was Professor Stanley Wijesundera, the revered first Vice Chancellor of the University of Colombo. A visionary scholar and a symbol of academic independence, he was shot dead inside the Library Room at College House in 1989—his only ‘crime’ was defying the JVP’s demand to shut down the university.

Soon after, Professor Chandratne Patuwathavithane, Vice Chancellor of the University of Moratuwa, was gunned down in his office in September 1989 for refusing to yield to JVP threats. The blood didn’t stop there. The JVP’s guns turned toward anyone who stood in their way:

Dr. Gladys Jayawardene, Chairperson of the State Pharmaceuticals Corporation—was gunned down in 1989.

Ven. Kotikawatte Saddhatissa Thera, a respected Buddhist monk and voice of moderation.

Thevis Guruge, Chairman of the Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation—was silenced forever.

Premakeerthi de Alwis, the beloved lyricist and broadcaster—was slaughtered simply for being a public figure who didn't sing their tune.

Hundreds of teachers, doctors, monks, public servants, and media personnel were murdered during the 1987–1989 JVP insurrection.

Their only fault was choosing reason over revolution, moderation over madness, and Sri Lanka over a blood-soaked dream.

And the JVP had the audacity to justify these killings. They called their victims “traitors.” But history remembers them as patriots.

The government, too, responded with barbaric force. In its effort to crush the JVP insurrection, it deployed every brutal tactic from the counterinsurgency playbook—mass arrests, extrajudicial killings, torture, and disappearances became commonplace.

By the time the insurrection was finally quelled in late 1989, estimates suggest that between 40,000 and 60,000 people—mostly young Sinhalese men and women—had lost their lives. The JVP's top leadership was decimated, and its militant machinery was dismantled.

Its anti-Indian crusade exacted a horrific toll—not only in lives but also on the national psyche—leaving behind a complex legacy of trauma and deep-rooted mistrust toward India.

JVP's Rebirth as the NPP

Over the next two decades, the JVP gradually shed much of its militant baggage. It contested elections, entered parliament, and even joined coalition governments briefly. Under Somawansa Amarasinghe and later Anura Kumara Dissanayake, the JVP moderated its ideology, moving away from insurrectionary Marxism toward a platform of anti-corruption, social justice, and good governance.

In this transformation, the JVP's strident anti-India line also began to soften. The new generation of leaders recognized that to be a credible national force – one aiming to govern, not just protest – they could ill afford the ideological rigidity of the past.

When Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Sri Lanka, NPP politicians displayed none of the hostility their party elders once harbored. Anura Kumara Dissanayake himself spoke of the “mutual respect” between Sri Lanka and India—a far cry from Rohana Wijeweera's caustic denunciations decades ago. Notably, the JVP's 1980s-era rhetoric portraying India as an imperialist oppressor is absent from the NPP's current discourse.

Pragmatism Over Dogma: A Calculated Shift

What explains this stunning about-face in the JVP's stance toward India? At first glance, it might appear hypocritical—how does a party go from oath-bound anti-Indian militancy to signing defence agreements with the very same nation? But a closer, more analytical look suggests something else.

The ideological rigidity that once helped the JVP rally rebellions is ill-suited for the

complex, pragmatic demands of governing a modern nation-state. To its credit, the JVP seems to have recognized this hard truth.

Engaging constructively with India is not merely diplomatic courtesy—it is a strategic necessity. Geography and economics both demand it. India is not only Sri Lanka’s closest neighbor but also a regional superpower and a vital economic partner. When Sri Lanka teetered on the brink of financial collapse in 2022, it was India that stepped in first—with over \$4 billion in emergency aid, credit lines, and essential supplies.

Any political force serious about steering Sri Lanka out of the crisis must maintain stable, respectful ties with New Delhi—especially in the wake of new U.S. tariff hikes, including a proposed 44% tariff on certain goods. The United States currently absorbs around 25% of Sri Lanka’s exports, making diversification and regional trade relations even more critical.

The NPP leadership seems to understand this reality. In shedding its reflexive anti-India posture, the JVP/NPP has significantly boosted its credibility as a responsible, mainstream political actor—one that places national interest above ideological rigidity.

This recalibration sends a clear signal to voters—and to international partners—that an NPP-led government would not jeopardize Sri Lanka’s foreign relations for the sake of outdated revolutionary rhetoric. Instead, it aspires to govern with realism, responsibility, and reform.

In a country long trapped between populism and paralysis, this shift is not just welcome—it is essential. And at Jaffna Monitor, we are glad to acknowledge it.

Warm regards,

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

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7.7 Magnitude, Zero Mercy: Myanmar's Quake Meets a Merciless Regime

■
Jaffna Monitor in Mandalay,
Myanmar

At midday on March 28, 2025, a powerful 7.7-magnitude earthquake struck central Myanmar, with its epicenter near Mandalay—a city where Tamils form a notable part of the population.

It was one of the most devastating quakes to hit the country in a century. The destruction was swift, merciless, and deeply tragic.

The military regime, already notorious for its secrecy and lack of transparency, began downplaying the true scale of the disaster. In a move to control the narrative, the junta swiftly suspended journalist visas, effectively shutting out the international media and limiting independent reporting on the ground.

But Jaffna Monitor chose not to look away. Determined to witness the catastrophe firsthand, we set out for earthquake-hit Mandalay. We reached out to our contacts in Myanmar—including two “Rakhi sisters” of one of our senior correspondents, who lives in Sri Lanka.

For readers unfamiliar with the term, the Rakhi sisters are not related by blood. The bond was formed years ago during a Raksha Bandhan celebration, when the two young women, residents of Mandalay, tied a symbolic rakhi (a sacred thread) on his wrist—a gesture signifying a lifelong sibling relationship. That bond of affection and solidarity has endured ever since.

But this was no ordinary reporting trip. With commercial flights suspended and the military junta increasingly suspicious of anyone entering the country after the quake, we couldn't take the usual routes. Instead, we flew into Yangon and then undertook a long, discreet overland journey. For security



reasons, we won't disclose exactly how we reached Mandalay—but we got there. Somehow, within days of the disaster.

One of our team members, a devoted Buddhist with strong connections to the monasteries and monks in Mandalay, arranged for us to stay at a Buddhist monastery located in the heart of the city.

And what we saw... was beyond words.

Mandalay After the Quake

When we reached Mandalay—Myanmar's second-largest city, once a vibrant hub adorned with majestic Buddhist and Hindu shrines, and strategically located along vital trade routes—it felt like stepping into the aftermath of an apocalypse. Once a flourishing cultural and commercial center that prompted





both regional powers, India and China, to establish consulates, Mandalay now lay in ruins.

When Jaffna Monitor arrived, the city resembled a vast open-air refugee camp. Nearly everyone was outside. Many of Mandalay's 1.5 million residents were sleeping on the streets, in parks, and on temple grounds—either because their homes had collapsed or out of fear that aftershocks would bring down the already-weakened structures. Wild rumors swept through the city—whispers of an even more powerful quake on the way. Even those whose homes remained intact refused to go inside.

According to local sources, more than 5,000 people were killed—nearly double the death toll acknowledged by the military junta. Médecins Sans Frontières reported that over 500 buildings had collapsed entirely, with another 800 partially destroyed. Critical infrastructure was severely damaged: major bridges buckled, roads cracked open, and the

city's airport sustained structural damage. Power outages plunged Mandalay into darkness, while water and communication networks failed completely.

With little to no access to heavy machinery, rescue efforts remained heartbreakingly rudimentary. Locals and volunteers dug through the debris using their bare hands and makeshift tools, desperate to find survivors. As of now, only 15 people have been pulled out alive. The rest... never made it.

“There's too much rubble, and no proper rescue teams have come for us,” sobbed a woman digging through the debris in search of her missing relatives.

In the stifling April heat—when temperatures soared to 39–41°C—survivors and first responders labored under unbearable conditions. Occasional nighttime rains brought no relief—only added misery. Yet no one dared return indoors. “We would rather be drenched and bitten by mosquitoes than

buried under bricks,” said Muthu, an elderly Tamil man, huddled beneath a tarpaulin sheet.

The relatively well-off slept outdoors under mosquito nets, while the poor lay on bare ground with only a thin cloth—or nothing at all. But fear erased social divides. Ironically, everyone—from the affluent to the destitute—was united by the catastrophe.

Anytime, an Epidemic’: Quake-Hit Mandalay Faces New Threat

A local relief worker told Jaffna Monitor that delivering aid to everyone in need was “a near-impossible task.” The scale of the devastation was overwhelming. “There aren’t enough tents, not enough food or clean water. Women and children are especially vulnerable,” he said,

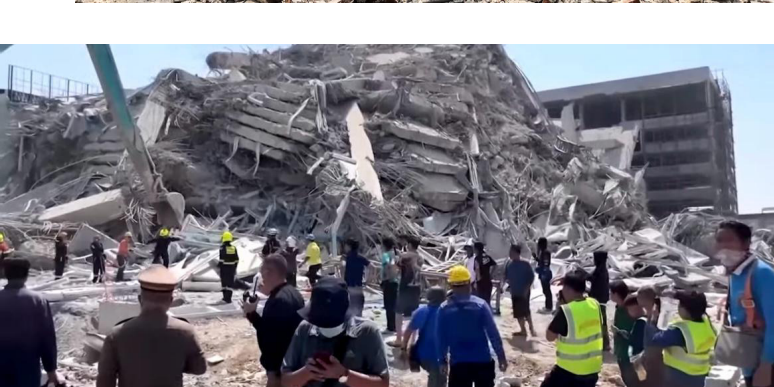


visibly exhausted. Many families lacked basic hygiene kits, sanitary products, and baby formula.

With sanitation systems completely broken down, open defecation was becoming increasingly common, and access to clean water was dangerously limited. “If this continues,” warned another aid worker, “we could be facing a deadly outbreak of cholera or other waterborne diseases.” He added grimly, “An epidemic could strike Mandalay any day now.”

The Only Quake the Junta Fears Is a Truthquake

One thing noticeably missing in Mandalay was a familiar sight that usually follows





*A Hindu Tamil temple in Mandalay, Myanmar
— captured by Jaffna Monitor*

a major natural disaster: the presence of international journalists. Typically, media teams from around the world would converge to document the devastation and amplify the voices of survivors. But in Myanmar, the military junta effectively banned foreign



journalists from entering the country and intimidated local reporters into silence.

To justify the ban on international media, the junta issued what can only be described as a cruel excuse. In an official statement, the military claimed that, since “there is no proper accommodation or food facilities in the affected areas,” journalists would not be permitted entry—as if foreign correspondents were arriving for a luxury retreat amidst the ruins.

But the real reason behind the ban is not logistical—it is political. Jaffna Monitor has learned that the junta’s true fear is scrutiny, not shortage. A Yangon-based journalist,



Arrival of a Russian aircraft, captured by Jaffna Monitor



speaking on condition of anonymity due to obvious safety concerns, told us: “The junta is afraid that if foreign journalists are allowed in, they will head straight to the conflict zones and expose the brutal human rights violations being committed by the military.”

Myanmar’s Military Drops Bombs Instead of Aid

Since the February 2021 military coup—in which the junta seized power from Myanmar’s elected government—the country has been plunged into a nationwide civil conflict. Fierce resistance has emerged across multiple regions, most notably in Sagaing, Chin, Kayah, and the Karen States. The junta’s counterinsurgency campaign has been marked by aerial bombings, extrajudicial killings, the burning of entire villages, and deliberate attacks on civilian infrastructure, including schools and hospitals.

The military’s brutality has not paused—even in the face of a humanitarian disaster. A

Myanmar journalist based in Mandalay told Jaffna Monitor that in Sagaing—one of the regions hardest hit by the earthquake—the junta bombed an area where civilians were actively rescuing people trapped beneath collapsed buildings. “People were digging through the rubble to save others when the bombs fell,” the journalist said. “It was chaos. The junta didn’t care if they were hitting survivors or volunteers.”

Multiple reports by the United Nations and international human rights organizations have accused the Tatmadaw—the official name of Myanmar’s military—of committing war crimes and crimes against humanity. The regime has aggressively sought to suppress this reality by tightly controlling the flow of information, arresting more than 150 journalists since the coup, and forcing nearly all independent media outlets to shut down, flee the country, or operate in hiding.

Myanmar has a long and troubling history of blocking journalists and humanitarian workers—even in the wake of catastrophic



natural disasters. In 2008, when Cyclone Nargis devastated the Irrawaddy Delta and killed an estimated 138,000 people, the military regime shocked the world by denying international aid agencies access during the critical early weeks of the crisis. Thousands of lives were lost due to delayed assistance.

The pattern repeated in 2023, after Cyclone Mocha—a powerful storm that battered Rakhine State and other western regions. Despite widespread destruction and displacement, the junta once again barred international humanitarian workers from reaching affected areas. Even the United Nations issued a rare public condemnation, urging the regime to permit lifesaving relief operations.

“This time, however, is a little different,” a local civil society leader told Jaffna Monitor. In the aftermath of the March 2025 earthquake, the junta—for the first time in recent memory—issued an open call for international assistance.

“They had no choice,” he explained. “The destruction was too massive, and they simply lacked the capacity to respond on their own.”

As a result, emergency responders from the United Nations and several international NGOs were granted limited access—but only to areas firmly under military control. Rebel-held regions such as parts of Sagaing, Chin, and Kayah remained off-limits.

In Mandalay itself, some neighborhoods had slipped from the junta’s grasp and were under the control of anti-junta resistance forces. Just across the Irrawaddy River, Sagaing had become one of the most intense battlegrounds in the ongoing civil conflict. While we were still in Mandalay, we heard the unmistakable sound of an airstrike—this time targeting civilian areas in earthquake-ravaged Sagaing. According to local sources, the junta had launched the attack as part of its continued military campaign against the People’s Defence Forces (PDF), a decentralized resistance



movement formed in response to the 2021 coup.

To make matters worse, the junta blocked all humanitarian aid to rebel-held areas, halting relief efforts completely. Entire villages—already reduced to rubble by the earthquake—were denied even basic emergency support such as food, water, and medical supplies.

Most of the People's Defence Forces—composed largely of young, inexperienced fighters—operate under the command of the National Unity Government (NUG), a parallel government-in-exile formed by ousted lawmakers, ethnic minority leaders, and civil society representatives. While the junta brands the NUG and the PDFs as “terrorists,” many Burmese view them as the legitimate voice of resistance and hope.

Shaken but Not Broken: Myanmar's Centuries-Old Tamil Community Endures in the Quake Zone

The Tamil community of Myanmar has a long, storied history—and a delicate present. Tamils, most of whom trace their ancestry to southern

India, began migrating to Burma in the 19th century when both regions were under British colonial rule.

Under British administration, many Indians—including Tamils—moved into Upper Burma as civil servants, traders, soldiers, and laborers. Over time, Tamils became an integral part of the country's social and economic life, especially in cities like Yangon (formerly Rangoon) and Mandalay.

Today, Tamils form the largest subgroup within Myanmar's Indian-origin population, which makes up roughly 4–5% of the national demographic. Tamil is the most widely spoken Indian language in the country. Many Tamil families are now in their fourth or fifth generation in Myanmar and have preserved key aspects of their heritage—from Hindu temples and Tamil schools to traditional festivals—while integrating into broader Burmese society.

Mandalay remains one of the central hubs of this community. Tamil traders and craftsmen have for decades run businesses ranging from textiles and spices to jewelry and tea shops. In the historic old town alone, around 500

Tamil families have built a vibrant, close-knit community. The area is also home to two prominent Tamil temples: the Siddhi Vinayaka Temple (popularly known as the Ganesh Temple) and the Sri Muneeswaran Temple. Remarkably, both emerged unscathed from the recent earthquake—a fact many locals regard as nothing short of divine intervention.

But the surrounding Tamil quarters were not so fortunate. Dozens of homes and shops were flattened. Once-busy tea stalls, saree shops, and temple courtyards now lie buried beneath rubble.

Tamil Christian communities in nearby areas have also suffered deeply. In Chin Nyaung Pin Thar, a village outside Mandalay, the Calvary Prayer Hill and surrounding Christian settlements sustained extensive damage during the quake, leaving many injured and displaced.

“As with their Burmese neighbors, Tamil families have been left homeless and are struggling to secure even the most basic necessities—clean water, food, and medicine,” said a retired schoolteacher and community elder. His own home in Mandalay’s 26th Street Tamil quarter was destroyed. “My daughter and grandchildren are sleeping under a tree in the temple compound. We haven’t received any formal aid. Everything we’re eating now comes from what the community cooks together in large pots,” he told Jaffna Monitor.

A Yangon-based Tamil aid coordinator confirmed the lack of organized relief in several neighborhoods across Mandalay. “Many areas have yet to be reached by aid agencies,” she said. “The Tamil enclaves in Mandalay are among them. Most residents





A Tamil home in Mandalay damaged by the earthquake

are relying entirely on grassroots, community-driven solidarity.”

Still, amid the devastation, resilience prevails. Community members—regardless of ethnicity—have come together to share what little they have. Volunteers like 19-year-old Arulmurugan from the Tamil Youth Forum have been delivering food packets and boiled water from makeshift kitchens. “We don’t ask if someone is Tamil or Bamar,” he said. “We just ask, ‘Have you eaten?’”

Aid Stalled. Fear Spreads

For a brief period following the earthquake, Myanmar’s military junta eased roadblocks and allowed limited humanitarian access. But during Jaffna Monitor’s time in Mandalay, we witnessed a reversal: roadblocks and military checkpoints were swiftly re-established, restricting the movement of both local and international relief workers.

While foreign rescue teams from neighboring countries were technically permitted entry,

their operations remained tightly controlled. Teams from India, China, Thailand, Singapore, Laos, Malaysia, and Russia were escorted by the military and confined to designated zones within Mandalay.

Among the international presence, Russian rescue workers stood out. According to a local anti-junta activist who spoke to Jaffna Monitor, “Russia is the junta’s main facilitator—offering moral, financial, and even military support.” Two Russian aircraft landed in Mandalay, carrying more than 300 rescue workers. Yet despite their numbers, one Russian relief worker privately admitted they had rescued only a single person alive from the debris.

A group of Sri Lankans working in Yangon pooled their own resources to deliver aid. “We couldn’t just sit and watch,” said one volunteer. “Even though we’re far from home, we know what it means to suffer. We just wanted to help.” The group traveled to Mandalay and directly distributed food, water, and essential supplies to affected families.

Echoes of Mullivaikkal

Though the military junta has banned relief work in rebel-held areas—and continues relentless shelling even as civilians remain trapped under debris—Jaffna Monitor has learned that some courageous local organizations are still carrying out humanitarian operations in these zones, albeit clandestinely.

“We call them low-profile operations,” said one aid worker who managed to enter the rebel-controlled territories. Speaking under strict anonymity, he described the situation as “unexplainable, almost medieval.” Hospitals have been destroyed or abandoned, and even the most basic medical supplies—antibiotics, painkillers, bandages—are nearly impossible to find. “No outsiders are allowed in, and the military doesn’t want the world to know what’s happening here,” he added.

The current crisis bears an unsettling resemblance to a dark chapter in recent history—the final months of Sri Lanka’s civil war in 2009—when tens of thousands of Tamil civilians were trapped between an unrelenting military offensive and the rigid extremism of the LTTE, with no access to humanitarian assistance or safe passage. “What we are witnessing now is disturbingly similar,” a Tamil aid worker told Jaffna Monitor. “As in Sri Lanka, it is the ordinary civilians—not the decision-makers—who are caught in the crossfire.”

Another relief worker echoed the tragedy: “Most of these people were already victims of war—displaced, impoverished, traumatized. Now the earthquake has shattered what little they had left.”

Where Does the Aid Go? Junta’s Grip Casts Doubt on Relief Efforts

Given the deeply corrupt nature of Myanmar’s military junta, relief workers who spoke with Jaffna Monitor expressed serious skepticism about how much of the international aid will actually reach those most in need.

Members of several relief agencies now argue that humanitarian assistance must be channeled through independent local networks—such as monasteries, community groups, and civil society organizations—rather than routed through the junta. Only then, they insist, can essential supplies genuinely reach affected communities.

An aid worker recalled how, in the past, multiple governments had sent direct assistance to the military regime following natural disasters—only to later find that much of the aid never reached the public. “Some of it ended up in the homes of military leaders,” he said, “and the rest was being sold openly in local markets.” Having witnessed this firsthand, he questioned the logic of repeating the same mistake. “Now again, some countries are sending aid directly to the junta, bypassing proper humanitarian channels. How can they be sure it won’t be exploited just like before?”

“Apart from the United States, many countries have offered help,” another aid worker told Jaffna Monitor. “But the real question is—how much of it actually reaches the people?” With corruption in the junta being well-documented, and in the absence of transparency or independent oversight, there is growing fear that a significant portion of the aid is being diverted, politicized, or simply disappearing without a trace.



Modi Preaches Unity, Tamil Leaders Ask: ‘Where’s That Being Sold?’



BY:

Our Special Correspondent

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, during his whirlwind visit to Sri Lanka, held a 45-minute meeting with a Tamil political delegation representing the Northern and Eastern Provinces. The group was made up of representatives from the Ilankai Tamil Arasu Katchi (ITAK), the Democratic Tamil National Alliance (DTNA), and the Tamil National People's Front (TNPF).

Interestingly, the delegation was formed based on a 4:2:1 ratio proposed by the Indian side—four from ITAK, two from DTNA, and one from TNPF.

The Tamil National Alliance (TNA) was represented by Acting President C.V.K. Sivagnanam, General Secretary M.A. Sumanthiran, and Members of Parliament S. Shritharan and Shanakiyan Rasamanickam. From the DTNA, MPs Selvam Adaikalanathan and Dharmalingam Siddharthan took part, while the TNPF was represented by its leader, MP Gajendrakumar Ponnambalam.

During the meeting with the Tamil political delegation, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi paid heartfelt tributes to the late Tamil political leaders R. Sampanthan and Mavai S. Senathirajah, describing them as stalwarts of Tamil politics in Sri Lanka and personal associates.

“I wish to express my condolences on the passing of respected Tamil leaders Mr. R. Sampanthan and Mr. Mavai Senathirajah. They were personally known to me, and their loss marks the end of an era,” PM Modi told the delegation.

“I remember how, during their time, Tamil parties stood united under one umbrella.”

Not stopping there, Modi took to X (formerly known as Twitter) shortly after the meeting, posting: “It is always a pleasure to meet with the leaders of the Tamil community in Sri Lanka. During this meeting, I conveyed my condolences on the passing of respected leaders R. Sampanthan and Mavai Senathirajah, both of whom I personally knew. I reaffirmed India’s unwavering commitment to ensuring equality, dignity, and justice for the

Tamil community within a united Sri Lanka. Several projects and initiatives launched during my visit will continue to contribute to the social, economic, and cultural advancement of the Tamil people.”

The Art of War: Sumanthiran vs. Sriitharan

Here’s the funny bit that didn’t make the official press releases: the lead-up to Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s meeting with the Tamil political delegation had its own mini power struggle—starring none other than the two rivals locked in the ongoing leadership tussle within the Ilankai Tamil Arasu Katchi (ITAK): M.A. Sumanthiran and S. Shritharan.

Sources say that both were working overtime behind the scenes to make sure the other didn’t get a chance to meet Modi. In a rather crafty move, Sumanthiran allegedly suggested that only the party’s President and General Secretary should attend the meeting, which conveniently meant himself and his loyalist, Acting President C.V.K. Sivagnanam—leaving others out.



Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi with leaders of ITAK, DTNA, and TNPF in Colombo

But not to be outmaneuvered, Shritharan countered with a suggestion of his own: only sitting MPs from ITAK should be invited—handily excluding Sumanthiran, who failed to win a seat in the last parliamentary elections.

Caught in the middle of this political ping-pong, the Indian side—clearly no strangers to Lankan Tamil petty politics—saw through the behind-the-scenes drama. They proposed that the ITAK delegation include the President, the General Secretary, and two MPs, ensuring that no one could claim victory in this unfolding Tamil telenovela. Accordingly, ITAK President C.V.K. Sivagnanam, General Secretary M.A. Sumanthiran, and sitting MPs Shanakiyan Rasamanickam and S. Shritharan made the cut.

Modi's Age Check Leaves ITAK President Blushing, Others Chuckling

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, known for his diligence in background checks before meeting any delegation, reportedly asked ITAK President C.V.K. Sivagnanam with a smile, “Are you over 90?” Sivagnanam replied with a chuckle, “No, no... I’m just 85.” Modi then remarked, “You’re probably the oldest Tamil politician in Sri Lanka,” according to a source who attended the meeting.

While the exchange appeared to be a lighthearted moment, a source within the ITAK later joked to Jaffna Monitor that Modi ji was perhaps subtly asking why Sivagnanam, at his age, wasn't enjoying retirement with his great-grandchildren—instead of acting as a puppet president for ITAK and playing the loyal footman to M.A. Sumanthiran.

ITAK's Electoral Maths: 5 > 1

Of the four members representing ITAK in

the delegation, three hailed from the North—specifically Jaffna—while only one, Shanakiyan Rasamanickam, represented the East (Batticaloa). The other three Tamil delegates—two from the DTNA and one from the TNPF—were also from the Northern Province.

This regional imbalance sparked sharp criticism on social media and among political observers, who questioned, “Are Eastern Tamil leaders not considered leaders too?” ITAK, in particular, came under fire, with many pointing out that in the last parliamentary election, the party secured just one seat in Jaffna, while it won five seats in the East.

Critics argue that this representation does not reflect the party's current electoral base, and accuse ITAK's leadership of continuing a Jaffna-centric approach at the expense of genuine inclusivity and balanced regional representation.

Lights, Camera, Boycott!

According to credible sources, ITAK (read: M.A. Sumanthiran and his loyal circle) had internally decided that Sumanthiran would speak on behalf of the Tamil delegation during the meeting with Prime Minister Modi. It was all neatly arranged—with a rehearsal, no less. A few hours before the official interaction, the four-member team even held a mock round, presumably to get the script just right.

But the drama didn't end there. Sumanthiran's arch-rival, MP S. Sritharan, reportedly skipped the rehearsal altogether—either as a silent protest or perhaps to avoid being typecast as a side character in what he saw as “The Sumanthiran Show.”

And if that wasn't dramatic enough, Sritharan doubled down by boycotting the official



*Prime Minister
Narendra Modi
with Sri Lankan
President
Anura Kumara
Dissanayake in
Anuradhapura*

ITAK press conference held after the meeting with Modi. As one insider quipped to Jaffna Monitor, “It was less of a press conference and more of a one-man monologue.”

India Reaffirms Support for Tamil Rights, Provincial Polls on the Horizon

Sources who attended the meeting told Jaffna Monitor that the closed-door discussion took place at the Taj Samudra Hotel and lasted approximately 45 minutes. During the dialogue, Prime Minister Modi conveyed that the Sri Lankan government, under President Anura Kumara Dissanayake, had given a clear commitment to hold the long-delayed Provincial Council elections—but only after the conclusion of local government polls and the implementation of necessary legal reforms.

According to those present, Modi assured the Tamil delegation that India would “do everything possible” to support this democratic process, and emphasized that New Delhi remains committed to Tamil political empowerment within a united Sri Lanka. He reportedly told the delegation, “India is like

your second home. You are welcome in Delhi at any time to engage in dialogue and share your concerns.”

The discussion also addressed the pressing issue of fishermen's rights, a longstanding source of friction between communities across the Palk Strait. Modi is said to have stressed the need for a humane and cooperative resolution, while voicing support for ending illegal bottom trawling practices—which have contributed to environmental degradation and increased tensions between Indian and Sri Lankan fishing communities.

Tamil Leaders Thank India, Demand Federal Path Beyond 13th Amendment.

At a press conference following their meeting with the Indian Prime Minister, Tamil political leaders raised a series of pressing concerns, ranging from power devolution and development to environmental and livelihood issues.

MP M.A. Sumanthiran welcomed India’s insistence on holding Provincial Council

*Prime Minister
Narendra Modi
worshipping
at the sacred
Bodhi Tree in
Anuradhapura*



elections but made it clear that “the 13th Amendment, even if fully implemented, is not enough” to deliver meaningful power-sharing. He highlighted the ongoing land appropriation in Tamil-majority areas. He also urged India to invest in long-term development in the North and East—particularly in housing, education, and infrastructure.

Dharmalingam Siddharthan expressed gratitude for Indian-backed projects like the Jaffna Cultural Centre, and stressed the urgent need for job-creating investments in the region. “We asked for Indian support to resolve the fisheries conflict and create employment for youth,” he said, adding that Prime Minister Modi responded positively and showed a willingness to engage further.

TNPF Leader Gajendrakumar Ponnambalam struck a firmer tone, describing the 13th Amendment as a “distorted outcome” of the Indo-Lanka Accord. He said he had told PM Modi that genuine power-sharing cannot occur within a unitary state, and that India must help move the Tamil question beyond that framework and urged him to invite Tamil political parties to Delhi for meaningful

discussions on establishing a shared governance model under the Indo-Lanka Accord.

Gajendrakumar also expressed full support for India-led development in the North and East, but with a firm caveat: it must not alter the demographic composition of the region—a pointed reference to Sinhala settlements that quietly may have crept in under the banner of “development.” But as one observer cheekily noted, for a man so vehemently opposed to Sinhala workers settling in Tamil areas, he didn’t quite explain how he himself came to own acres of prime land in the heart of Colombo and other Sinhala-majority zones. “One even wondered aloud,” the observer added, “whether he plans to donate that land to landless Sinhala families—just to keep things ideologically consistent.”

Gajendrakumar also stressed that developments must not open the door to foreign powers hostile to India’s interests—a not-so-subtle nod to China, which, unsurprisingly, likely earned him an approving smile or two from the Indian side.



Nithyananda

How a Tamil Fake Godman Fooled Bolivia's Indigenous People in His Quest to Create a Hindu Nation



BY:

கணியன் பூங்குன்றன்
Kaniyan Pungundran

Self-proclaimed Hindu godman and rape accused Nithyananda needs little or no introduction. Born to Tamil parents as Arunachalam Rajasekaran in the temple town of Tiruvannamalai, Tamil Nadu, he has, somehow, managed to gather a noticeable number of followers in Sri Lanka as well. His unofficial Dhyanaapeetams (meditation centres)

operate discreetly across the country, given the controversies and serious criminal charges associated with him.

Despite his notoriety, Nithyananda has attracted a significant number of devotees in Sri Lanka—primarily from Tamil-speaking areas. However, his following is not as widespread as that of another controversial figure, the late Swami Premananda, who was also accused of rape and was known to be the spiritual guru of C.V. Wigneswaran, the former Chief Minister of the Northern Province of Sri Lanka. Wigneswaran continues to organize Guru Pooja ceremonies annually on Premananda's death anniversary—despite the fact that Premananda was a convicted rapist and molester.

Nithyananda's influence is such that a few Tamils, who are among his most ardent devotees, shared accounts of supposed miraculous healings with Jaffna Monitor. One woman said she had resolved her long-standing migraine problem many years ago after invoking him. Another man from Batticaloa, who wished to remain anonymous, claimed that the 'miracle godman' healed his mother's chronic health issue through a Zoom call. However, Jaffna Monitor could not independently verify these extraordinary claims from a medical standpoint.

More than in Sri Lanka itself, Nithyananda seems to have infiltrated the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora communities abroad—particularly in Canada—on a surprisingly deep level. He has managed to attract a significant following among Sri Lankan Tamils, with many even joining his cult and becoming sannyasis (renunciates).

For instance, a woman of Jaffna origin and a Canadian citizen adopted the name Kailasa's Nithya Premaroopananda, while a Jaffna-born man named Umesh became Sri Nithya Omkarananda. These are just a couple of

examples. According to sources, hundreds of Sri Lankan diaspora members have joined the cult as sannyasis, while thousands more have become die-hard followers—mesmerized by Nithyananda's teachings, sugar-coated sermons, theatrical flair, or perhaps simply the promise of a spiritual utopia in an imaginary nation.

When the noose tightened around him following multiple rape allegations by former female disciples and a child abduction case involving two sisters who refused to return home from his ashram, Nithyananda vanished from India in 2019. He later re-emerged with perhaps the most brazen claim ever made by a self-styled godman: that he had founded a sovereign Hindu nation—the “United States of Kailasa” (USK), or simply, Kailasa.

This so-called nation, first declared in December 2019 by Nithyananda and his band of devout (and deluded?) followers—who claim it actually has real, physical territory. For many Sri Lankan Tamils—who spent nearly three decades fighting, bleeding, and dreaming of an independent state—the idea was, at first glance, nothing short of surreal. A few were even overheard muttering, half in jest and half in disbelief, that the Swami—godman, conman or cosmic prankster—had pulled off what even the mighty Prabhakaran, hailed by his hardcore fans as an avatar of Lord Murugan, and the LTTE couldn't manage.

Interestingly, Nithyananda even sought political asylum in Sri Lanka in 2022. Citing deteriorating health, the fugitive godman wrote a letter to the then President of Sri Lanka on 7 August 2022, requesting protection. Unsurprisingly, no one paid attention to his appeal.

While all this was unfolding, Indian law enforcement issued a Blue Notice via Interpol to help locate him. The Indian government went as far as canceling his passport and



warning foreign governments not to grant him entry. But Nithyananda had already vanished—slipping into a fog of speculation since 2019. To this day, nobody really knows where he is.

But Nithyananda is hardly stoppable. Clad in ornate attire resembling depictions of Lord Shiva—adorned with multiple rudraksha beads and his signature Jada Mudi (long matted hair)—he continues to appear regularly in online videos. In these broadcasts, he delivers sermons, answers questions from his devotees, mocks his critics, and even challenges Indian authorities with taunts like, “Catch me if you can.”

In one such session, he even blessed the controversial Jaffna MP, Ramanathan Archchuna, at the request of a devotee. However, he made it clear that, as the “Supreme Pontiff of Hinduism,” he would not take any political stance.

Wait... what? Supreme Pontiff of Hinduism? Yes, you read that right—Nithyananda doesn’t just style himself as the head of Kailasa; he has also grandiosely declared himself the “Supreme Pontiff of Hinduism.” And he hasn’t stopped there. According to him, his country has a population of two billion. How did he arrive at that number? Simple mathematics—by counting every Hindu in the world as a citizen of Kailasa.

In the early years following his Houdini-style disappearance, Nithyananda and his loyal band of followers cleverly and systematically spread the tale that Kailasa had been established on a private island off the coast of Ecuador. They even released a step-by-step travel itinerary to reach this mythical land—the first step, rather bizarrely, was to go to Australia.

However, the Ecuadorian government was

quick to pour cold water on the fantasy, firmly stating that Nithyananda had neither been granted asylum nor acquired any such land within their borders.

Yet, despite having no actual land or a shred of international recognition, Kailasa is promoted by Nithyananda as the world's only "sovereign Hindu nation" and a sanctuary for persecuted Hindus. When asked why he was so determined to establish a separate country, he once said, "I am the Head, the Supreme Pontiff, and the Supreme Leader of this nation. You can't charge me here with cases." A not-so-subtle nod to the multiple criminal charges still haunting him back in India.

But who can stop Nithyananda?

To lend Kailasa the appearance of a functioning state, Nithyananda has created an elaborate web of websites, social media channels, and NGOs. He has bestowed grandiose titles on his most trusted disciples, such as "Prime Minister," "Ambassador," and "Foreign Minister." Through calculated deception—at which Nithyananda has proven himself a master—he and his followers have managed to infiltrate global institutions and even persuade a few governments, many of which became laughingstocks and subjects of ridicule.

In 2023, Kailasa's self-declared "Permanent Ambassador to the UN," Vijayapriya Nithyananda, delivered a statement during a UN committee session in Geneva. The stunt prompted the UN to issue a rare clarification, clearly stating that Kailasa is not recognized and that any submissions from its representatives would be disregarded.

That same year, the city of Newark, New Jersey, USA, signed a laughable sister-city agreement with Kailasa, under the mistaken belief that



it was a legitimate sovereign nation. Days later, the agreement was voided and a public apology was issued, with officials admitting that no due diligence had been conducted. As U.S. newspapers sarcastically noted, "No due diligence" is one thing—but the authorities hadn't even performed a basic Google search.

Reports suggest that similar approaches were made to more than two dozen municipalities across the United States, particularly targeting smaller towns. Some of these towns even issued symbolic "Kailasa Day" proclamations—only to later discover they had been misled by representatives of a non-existent country.

In 2022, the scam reached Paraguay, where Kailasa operatives managed to secure a



cooperation agreement with the Ministry of Agriculture. Once the deception was exposed, the official involved was dismissed, and the government formally retracted the agreement.

But Nithyananda's quest for territory didn't end there. His loyal inner circle—more accurately, his most trusted and well-trained disciples—recently attempted to carve out a separate state within Bolivia, the South American nation. There, Kailasa's operatives struck a dubious 1,000-year land lease deal with certain indigenous communities, aiming to acquire nearly half a million hectares of Amazonian forest. The move marked one of the boldest and most bizarre attempts yet to secure actual territory for a nation that exists only in the minds of its believers.

The Bolivian Fantasy: How Kailasa Nearly Carved Out a Kingdom in the Amazon

In late 2024, the fugitive godman—still on the run and relentlessly chasing his fantastical dream of founding a nation where he could reign as the "Supreme Pontiff"—took his bizarre quest to the heart of Bolivia, a South American country known for its vast rainforests, cultural complexity, and strong indigenous autonomies.

What followed was perhaps the boldest, most surreal, and unintentionally comical chapter in the grand charade of Kailasa—and arguably in the wider theatre of self-styled godmen around the world.



Masquerading as emissaries of a legitimate state Nithyananda's hand-picked conmen and conwomen, began negotiating with Indigenous communities in Bolivia's Amazonian lowlands. They promised wealth, development, environmental protection (tapping into the locals' deep reverence for nature), international recognition, and pretty much anything else under the sun.

To forge an emotional connection with Indigenous leaders, they made a claim even more bizarre than the idea of creating an independent Hindu nation: they insisted that their leader, Nithyananda, was a descendant of the 'persecuted' Saiva Vellalar tribe of South India. Many of his disciples were also presented as oppressed members of the same community. This narrative was carefully crafted to tap into specific provisions in Bolivia's Political Constitution, which grants Indigenous peoples the right to self-governance and autonomy over vast territories.

For readers in Sri Lanka and India, this claim was nothing short of absurd—Saiva Vellalars are, in fact, a dominant, land-owning caste group that has historically never faced persecution. If anything, they were the ones calling the shots. Yet, astonishingly, Bolivia's indigenous leaders accepted the story without batting an eye. And thus, these leaders ended up signing what can only be described as one of the most bizarre deals in modern history.

By November 2024, Kailasa's envoys had secured signatures on secret agreements with indigenous leaders in Bolivia. In total, approximately 480,000 hectares—an area more than six times the size of the Jaffna District—were promised to a "nation" that doesn't even exist on any official map. But it wasn't just the scale that was shocking. The fine print revealed that Kailasa would be granted exclusive rights over the land's natural resources: minerals, water, timber—and not stopping there—

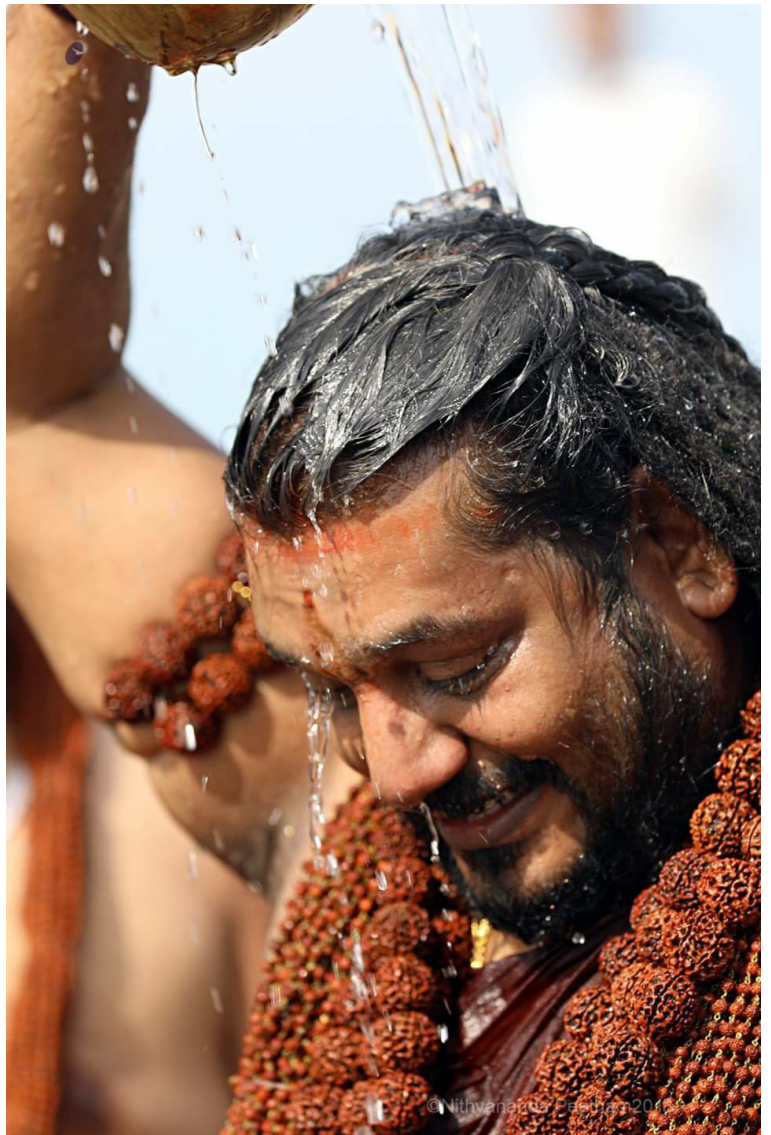
even the airspace above. According to the documents, Kailasa's laws would apply within these designated zones. Its currency would be legal tender. Its passports would be recognized alongside Bolivian ones. These agreements contained audacious and calculated blueprints for a state within a state.

The most outrageous clause? The lease duration itself: "This lease is for a period of one thousand (1000) years, to be renewed automatically and perpetually," the agreement reads. In practical terms, this wasn't a lease at all—it was a quiet, near-irrevocable land transfer cloaked in legalese.

Now a logical question arises: Why would anyone agree to such terms? The answer, at least partially, lies in the desperation and hope of the indigenous communities. According to later testimonies, Kailasa's delegates dangled promises of prosperity and self-reliance—offering visions of healthcare, schools, roads, and clean water. "They promised us humanitarian help in health, education, roads, and potable water—things we lack," said Pedro Guasico, a leader of the Baure community. "We were tricked."

However, a few Bolivian sources later debunked this narrative. While it's true that many Indigenous communities face serious challenges, some observers argue that the leaders who signed the deal may have had other motivations. After all, this fake godman is notorious for using lavish gifts—money, and at times even women—to win favor and influence decision-makers.

The deals remained hidden for months—until a brave journalist, Silvana Vincenti, a seasoned investigative reporter with *El Deber*, one of Bolivia's most respected newspapers, exposed the entire affair, triggering both national and



international outrage. Known for her relentless environmental reporting, she meticulously pieced together the story after days of rigorous on-the-ground investigation. The article hit like a thunderclap. The phrase "mil años"—a thousand years—leapt from headlines and echoed across Bolivia.

Thanks to her courageous reporting, what could have quietly become an annexation of ancestral land under the guise of spiritual kinship was brought into the daylight.

In this issue of *Jaffna Monitor*, we are proud to feature Silvana Vincenti's first exclusive interview with an Asian publication. In a wide-ranging and in-depth conversation, Vincenti walks us through her investigation, the risks she took, and what the story reveals about the complex intersection of faith and fraud.

COVER STORY

How I Uncovered the Plot to Create a Hindu Nation Within Bolivia:

Jaffna
Monitor's

EXCLUSIVE

INTERVIEW

with Silvana
Vincenti



BY:
Our Special
Correspondent



Silvana Vincenti

Silvana Vincenti is an award-winning investigative journalist, widely renowned in Bolivia for her fearless and impactful reporting. An alumna of Gabriel René Moreno University (UAGRM) in Santa Cruz, she brings over 13 years of experience with Grupo Multimedia El Deber, one of the country's most respected newspapers. Through her work at El Deber, she has built a formidable reputation for incisive investigations into environmental degradation, Indigenous rights, land encroachments, human trafficking, and systemic abuses linked to powerful land mafias.

A specialist in exposing the complex interplay between ecological crises and socio-political injustice, Vincenti's journalism reflects an unflinching commitment to truth, accountability, and the defense of marginalized communities.

She clinched first place in the Conservation International (CI) Nature Reporting Award and was a key member of the Amazon Underworld investigative team, which received the prestigious 2024 Gabriel García Márquez Award in the Coverage category. Over the years, she has solidified her status as one of Latin America's most tenacious and principled voices in journalism.

This is her first exclusive interview with an Asian publication.

What initially sparked your interest in investigating the activities of 'Kailasa' in Bolivia? Was there a specific tip-off or event that led you down this path?

The initial information came to me through an indigenous organization that discovered negotiations between Kailasa and leaders of three Amazonian indigenous nations. They

provided me with contracts that included a 1,000-year, automatically renewable land lease, along with other completely irrational clauses.

Could you explain how you discovered the presence of Kailasa agents in Bolivia? What made you think something was wrong?

After analyzing the documents and confirming their authenticity with the Indigenous people who had signed those contracts, I obtained the phone numbers of the representatives of Kailasa in Bolivia and contacted them. I sent them questions, but they did not respond. They only reached out to me once the matter had already been published. The day after the publication, they showed up at my office trying to persuade me that their intentions were good.

I realized something was wrong from the very first time I read the contracts—they were completely illegal because they disguised the sale of land using the word "lease." And this use of land is illegal in Bolivia; it's considered land trafficking.

Based on your investigation, what do you believe was Kailasa's true objective behind these thousand-year land lease agreements? Were they genuinely trying to establish an independent nation within Bolivian territory, or was their main goal to exploit the natural resources and strategic value of the Amazon under the pretext of spiritual and environmental cooperation?

From what I've investigated, Kailasa's demand for such a vast amount of land didn't make much sense—especially given that the area was sparsely populated. Only three people were living on the half a million hectares that were negotiated. Kailasa had already signed contracts as early as August last year, meaning that six months passed between the signing of the agreements and the public revelation of the matter.

All this leads me to suspect that Kailasa's true intention was to secure territory in order to function like a sovereign state within another sovereign state. And behind them, I believe there are powerful figures in Bolivia who are interested in the resources within these lands—resources that cannot legally be exploited—using Kailasa as a cover. For instance, at the time Kailasa signed the agreements, Bolivia was changing its policies regarding carbon markets, allowing it to enter that space. In a bankrupt country currently dependent on international loans, this could seem like an attractive economic alternative.

I believe someone saw Kailasa's need for land as an opportunity to gain access to Indigenous territories—perhaps to negotiate carbon credits—while risking national sovereignty. Otherwise, the Bolivian government's silence, even amid widespread media coverage and in an election year, is hard to explain.

It's worth noting that during the height of the controversy, the current president of Bolivia was photographed receiving a gift from a Kailasa representative. Politically, the right move would have been to publicly address the situation.

That photo was posted on President Luis Arce's social media in October last year, during the anniversary of the Indigenous organization CIDOB.

How did Kailasa manage to convince Indigenous leaders to sign these extraordinary 1,000-year land lease agreements? What kind of language, promises, or strategies did they use to earn the trust of these communities?

How they convinced the Indigenous leaders, how they initially contacted them, and who acted as intermediaries—these are the questions many of us want answers to. Unfortunately, we still don't have those answers because the Bolivian authorities simply deported the members of Kailasa without conducting any proper investigation. This has led to national criticism and fuels the suspicion that many more people may be involved behind the scenes.

I have received messages from Kailasa victims in other countries, asking whether the electronic devices of the Kailasa monks were checked to uncover who brought them into Bolivia. But even as journalists, we are in the dark—this information remains a mystery.

From what I know, Kailasa's promises revolved around humanitarian aid. Sadly, in Bolivia, many Indigenous communities have large expanses of land but very limited financial resources to make use of them. On top of that, they face constant threats—land grabbing, fires, intimidation, and other forms of pressure. All of this makes them highly vulnerable to exploitation by hidden interests.

It's also important to clarify that these agreements were made between a few Indigenous leaders and Kailasa, not with the broader Indigenous communities. In most cases, the majority of Indigenous people were completely unaware of these deals.



I've observed that Kailasa operates through an organization called the USK Foundation, which raises funds under the banner of humanitarian assistance. This raises a serious concern: Can donors actually verify that the aid reaches those it's meant to help? Because, according to the Indigenous people involved, they received nothing at all.

This is a crucial point. Kailasa approached Indigenous communities with offers of humanitarian assistance—the same promises they promote on the USK Foundation platform.

Beyond the 1,000-year duration, what were some of the most unusual or alarming clauses you found in the lease agreements between Kailasa and the Indigenous groups?

The contracts are lengthy—about 40 pages—and almost all of the clauses are absurd and abusive toward the indigenous peoples

of Bolivia and the country's sovereignty. However, to summarize the most alarming points, it appeared as though Kailasa wanted the Bolivian state and Indigenous communities to serve it—as if it were some kind of monarchy.

For example, one clause stated that the airspace and the natural resources both above and below the ground would be under the control of Kailasa. This is illegal, as Bolivian law clearly states that such resources belong to the Bolivian state. These clauses are a direct violation of national sovereignty.

Kailasa also demanded protection in case of aggression or persecution and stated that this protection should come from both the Indigenous communities and state entities such as the police. However, in the same breath, the contract made it clear that neither the Indigenous groups nor the Bolivian authorities could interfere in Kailasa's internal affairs.

Another clause even mentioned the word asylum—it seems the leader of Kailasa may have been seeking to take refuge in Bolivia. Kailasa also self-identified as an Indigenous nation doing business with other Indigenous peoples, completely sidestepping the formal institutions of the Bolivian state. They claimed to have their own passport, embassies, currency, and bank and tried to justify all of this under the constitutional provision for Indigenous autonomy and self-governance in Bolivia.

In what way is Kailasa portraying its leader, Nithyananda, as belonging to an Indigenous community—specifically the Saiva Vellalar—when in reality, this group comes from an upper-caste Hindu agrarian background? how are they justifying this identity?

I don't know if, in all their approaches to other countries, Kailasa representatives claimed to be from an Indigenous background, but I do know they did so in Ecuador and Bolivia.

In the specific case of Bolivia, the contracts signed with Indigenous leaders show that Kailasa's delegates identified themselves as Indigenous and strategically invoked certain articles of Bolivia's Political Constitution, which grants autonomy and self-governance to Indigenous communities—many of whom control vast territories.

I believe Kailasa exploited this legal provision to gain the trust of Bolivian Indigenous communities. But they only used the parts of the law that suited their interests. They deliberately ignored the other constitutional clauses that clearly state Indigenous lands

are inviolable, non-transferable, non-mortgageable, and indivisible.

Nithyananda is widely seen as a spiritual conman with an uncanny ability to deceive. In the case of Bolivia, did he personally play any role, or was it entirely orchestrated by his disciples? What psychological tactics or forms of manipulation were used to persuade the indigenous leaders?

Apparently, the negotiations were carried out through Nithyananda's disciples, but there is no certainty. It's also quite possible that Nithyananda himself negotiated directly with high-ranking public officials. We could only know for sure if the Bolivian state had shown an interest in investigating the matter.

I realized the high level of persuasion Kailasa employs when their representatives came to my office. They are extremely charismatic, calm, and persuasive in the way they speak—and they often send women ahead as representatives. Fortunately, I had already read the contracts before meeting them, and they clearly contradicted what Kailasa claims to stand for. That contradiction raised my suspicions about their true intentions.

This religious group promotes a message of humanitarian aid, fraternity, and shared suffering. They use victimhood narratives to place themselves on equal footing with Indigenous communities. But the reality is that the contracts are irrational, illegal, and abusive—especially toward vulnerable groups like the Indigenous peoples of Bolivia.

Reports and credible sources suggest



that Nithyananda is widely known for using his female monks to get close to influential individuals—essentially treating them as "sexual offerings," according to various investigations. Disturbingly, some of these women, reportedly under psychological manipulation, were said to be willing participants. Was there any indication of such behavior occurring during Kailasa's operations in Bolivia?

As a journalist, I had minimal contact with members of Kailasa, aside from a few WhatsApp exchanges with a translator and delegate based in Bolivia, and during the time of the interview with the authorities of that religious group.

What I can confirm is that the majority of

Kailasa members in Bolivia were women—at least among those who were deported. It appeared they did not make decisions independently, often deferring to their superiors. Since Bolivian state authorities have remained silent on the matter, only they could provide definitive answers—if there were any genuine interest in conducting a thorough investigation.

This information is new to me, so out of curiosity, I reached out to a former Kailasa member who is still in contact with me. This was her response: "Nithyananda runs a human trafficking ring—a circle of completely devoted individuals whom he sexually exploits. He constantly demands explicit photos and videos, exerting total manipulation and control. These people show absolute loyalty and are capable of making any sacrifice or carrying out any act for him, even illegal ones such as smuggling assets like gold and cash across borders, money laundering, and sexual services. The leadership functions like a mafia.

Those at the top know everything, while the people below are kept in the dark about what's really happening.

The Baure, Cayubaba, and Esse Eja communities are known for their deep connection to their ancestral lands. How did they come to sign these deals with a figure like Nithyananda? Was there consensus within the communities, or were there differing viewpoints and internal debates?

It's clear that there was no consensus regarding the signing of the contracts with Kailasa. Proof of this is that when this deal was reported in the media, the leaders who signed it had to publicly retract their claims and withdraw.

Furthermore, in Bolivia, there is a legal procedure for Indigenous communities called prior consultation. This means that Indigenous leaders must consult with the grassroots and higher-level organizations on any important decision. Further evidence that the entire Indigenous population was not consulted is that there were moments of tension when the residents of the Cayubaba territory demanded that the Kailasa monks show them the documents because their leaders refused to do so.

What was the response from the indigenous communities once your exposé came out? Did they feel deceived, or embarrassed, or were some still defending the agreements?

Following the report's publication, the Indigenous communities involved publicly announced their withdrawal from the contract, especially the leaders who signed the

documents.

In some cases, they claimed they had been manipulated in their innocence.

After publishing your story, you faced intimidation and threats. Could you share more about that experience and how you dealt with the pressure to silence your reporting?

After the first article was published, I received around twenty phone calls from numbers all over the world. One of the Indigenous leaders involved also messaged me, saying I didn't know who I had messed with.

When the threat became public and received significant media attention, that same Indigenous leader retracted his statement, claiming that he had been under the influence of alcohol at the time.

The day after the first publication, representatives of Kailasa showed up at my office unannounced and waited for hours, even though I had told them I would be late. When I finally met with them, they appeared friendly on the surface, but they refused to show any form of identification, and I noticed they were taking photos of me secretly. I later found out that these photos were sent to the Indigenous leaders who had signed the contracts—many of whom were feeling nervous about the press coverage. Kailasa was using these messages to claim they were “influencing me” or had control over me.

They also subtly told me that some international media outlets had retracted their stories. They even showed me supposed retraction links on a computer—but refused to share them.

Most recently, on Sunday, March 30, I received a second threat—this time a legal notice from Kailasa, accusing me of defamation and discrimination against Kailasa based on their Hindu beliefs and Indigenous identity, among other things. They demanded a retraction and gave me a deadline of 48 hours.

Alongside this threat, they also intimidated other Bolivian journalists, gradually sending them messages that included links to articles Kailasa claimed were defamatory.

How do you assess the Bolivian government's response to the Kailasa scandal? Were they proactive, or did it take public outrage for authorities to act?

The Bolivian government's response was—and continues to be—shameful, as they have not investigated who brought Kailasa into the country or for what purpose. They have also failed to investigate the threats made against the journalists who reported on the issue.

The government's approach has been to simply bury the scandal through brief and vague official statements, and even those only came after significant public pressure.

Various organizations have condemned the threats against journalists—but not the Bolivian government.

Do you think we've seen the end of Kailasa's operations in South America, or is it possible that more hidden deals, land grabs, or vulnerable communities have been targeted elsewhere?

As long as the leader of Kailasa remains a fugitive, they will continue looking for places to shelter him. I suspect that they are still in Bolivia and that not all of their members were deported.

They didn't just reach out to Indigenous communities—they also contacted mayors, since municipal governments also control lands and natural reserves. I believe the world needs to be aware of this situation, especially Indigenous peoples, many of whom live in isolated areas and have no access to this kind of information.

In fact, even after reporting on three Indigenous territories, we later discovered a fourth contract with Kailasa, this time involving the Guaraní Indigenous people.

Many of Kailasa's envoys were foreign nationals—Irish, Chinese, and American. Did your investigation uncover how this diverse network was organized and what roles these individuals played?

I haven't yet reached that level of research, but some victims who predated the events in Bolivia contacted me to tell me that many followers of Nithyananda are indoctrinated in India. They arrive there with the idea of mysticism in that country, seeking a spiritual answer.

It's easy to see that these people, followers of Nithyananda, have no voice since they are not authorized to give answers; they are only a bridge to other people in more hierarchical positions. I could see this when I interviewed them; they didn't respond; they only connected me with their leaders.



According to your investigation, where is Nithyananda's so-called imaginary country 'The United States of Kailasa' actually located? Some reports claim he bought an island in North America, while others say it has no real territory and functions only as a traveling cult. What's the truth, and is there any credible evidence of a physical nation?

When I interviewed representatives of Kailasa, they did not provide any concrete information about its location. They claimed to have autonomous territory and mentioned Oceania, but without specifying exactly where. Previously, when Kailasa made headlines in Ecuador, there were rumors that they had purchased an island in that country. There is a lot of speculation, but very little certainty.

Furthermore, there is a communication aspect of Kailasa that is rarely discussed. Although these monks have no voice, they are trained to film everything and use those images to victimize Kailasa. You can see this on her social media, where Kailasa claims that Bolivian authorities abused her human rights, showed them weapons, etc., but she doesn't say that the authorities simply took their phones because the monks kept recording during the Immigration operations.

On its social media platforms, Kailasa doesn't mention how it attempted to exploit the Indigenous people of Bolivia—an abuse that would likely have continued had the contracts not been made public. Kailasa also doesn't share the actual contracts signed with Indigenous communities, nor does it acknowledge the statements from these communities denouncing that they were misled and manipulated.

Without a doubt, Kailasa is a fictitious nation. A clear example of this is what happened in Bolivia, where they negotiated land while demanding sovereignty and even mentioning the possibility of asylum—likely to benefit Nithyananda himself.

Has Nithyananda made any attempts to establish a nation in other parts of the Americas—or elsewhere in the world? Have you come across any credible indications of land claims outside Bolivia?

I'm unaware of any efforts outside Bolivia, mainly because Kailasa's publications in other countries are very vague and general. From what I can tell, their greatest progress was in Bolivia, especially regarding the contracts—perhaps more than anywhere else. But only

Nithyananda truly knows the full extent of their activities.

However, as I mentioned earlier, Kailasa claims to possess sovereign, autonomous, and semi-autonomous territories. One person who might know the locations of these claimed territories—at least in Latin America—is Miguel Antonio Chumapi, an Ecuadorian lawyer affiliated with Kailasa. He lobbied with Indigenous communities in Bolivia and has also worked with the group in Ecuador.

Nithyananda is a rape accused and a fugitive wanted by the Indian government. As a journalist who has uncovered the global scope of his activities, what would you say to the Government of India? Is there more they can do?

As a journalist, I would tell the Indian government that if they are truly interested in locating Nithyananda, they should communicate directly with the Bolivian government and request the names and passport details of the individuals who were deported, so they can be properly investigated. They should also inquire whether their electronic devices were examined.

Perhaps the Indian government could uncover more than what we, as Bolivian journalists, have been able to.

What would you like to say to Nithyananda's blind followers—particularly in India, Sri Lanka, and other countries—who continue to believe in him despite the mounting evidence and criminal charges against him?

I would say: Don't let your need for spiritual connection lead you into networks of manipulation. If I hadn't read the contracts between Kailasa and the Indigenous communities in Bolivia before interviewing the monks, I might have believed them—they're extremely convincing in person. But they're also manipulative on social media, where they distort reality to suit their narrative.

However, the documents speak for themselves. They are harmful to Indigenous communities, a threat to state sovereignty, and completely contradict Kailasa's public message of humanitarian aid.

There were red flags from the start: they avoided showing their identity documents, didn't say where they were staying, and didn't speak freely without permission from their leaders.

They present themselves as friendly to gain trust—but once questioned, they turn threatening, just as they did with us, the Bolivian journalists. They demand retractions under the threat of legal action.

Another disturbing sign: they weren't even living in the territory, yet one of the two houses in the Cayubaba territory was designated as Kailasa's Supreme Court of Justice. That tells us that their judicial arm is more important to them than their humanitarian mission or diplomatic presence.

The question is—why a Supreme Court? Is it to intimidate Indigenous communities, or for something else?

Only Kailasa's current and former members, who are subject to that system of justice, know the answer.

‘Appi poi ille’: Jaffna Airport to Become Fully International by September 30, Says

Minister Bimal Rathnayake



Minister of Transport, Highways, Ports, and Civil Aviation, Bimal Rathnayake, has announced that Palaly Airport in Jaffna will be officially elevated to the status of a fully functioning international airport by September 30, 2025.

Speaking to Jaffna-based journalists during an inspection tour of the airport earlier this month, the Minister set a firm deadline and assured—in a mix of Sinhala and Tamil—“Appi poi ille – this time, it’s not a lie,” directly addressing the long-standing frustrations of Northern residents over a string of unfulfilled promises by successive governments.

“This is not like the previous administrations that made empty pledges. This time, we are serious” he emphasized.

Just days before the Minister’s visit, Jaffna Monitor, in its editorial, highlighted the urgent need for reliable international air connectivity in the region. Jaffna Monitor also learned

that weeks ahead of the Minister’s arrival, a powerful civil society group named IMPACT (Interdisciplinary Multifaceted Professionals for Active Community Transformations)—comprising leading figures from Jaffna—met with influential members of the National People’s Power (NPP) in Jaffna to advocate for the full-fledged development of the airport.

Minister Rathnayake was accompanied on his visit by senior officials and NPP members, including Fisheries Minister Ramalingam Chandrasekar and Jaffna MPs Ilangkumaran and Sripavanandarajah. The delegation held on-site discussions with aviation engineers, airport officials, and technical experts to assess current capabilities and identify necessary upgrades.

The Minister noted that the existing infrastructure at Palaly already meets several key international standards. He further emphasized the government’s intention to amend aviation laws to permit greater

flexibility for domestic and private airline operators to utilize the airport—aiming to boost tourism, investment, and regional access.

“At present, Jaffna residents must rely solely on the Katunayake Airport for international travel, despite having an airport in their own region. That must change. With appropriate legal reforms, even private aircraft owners will be able to operate flights to and from Jaffna—serving public needs and business interests alike,” he stated.

The transformation of Palaly Airport into

a fully operational international hub is widely regarded as a crucial move toward reconnecting the Northern Province—still recovering from the aftermath of decades of conflict—with the rest of the country and the global community. The initiative is expected to invigorate the regional economy, facilitate diaspora engagement, enhance accessibility, and strengthen national integration.

Whether this turns out to be appi poi ille (not a lie) or simply appi poi (just another lie), only time will tell.

Leaving Lectures for Lofty Ambitions: NPP's Mayoral Candidate Skips the Syllabus

The National People's Power (NPP) mayoral candidate for Jaffna, Dr. Kapilan, is under fire amid allegations of abandoning key academic responsibilities at the University of Jaffna's Faculty of Arts.

Once a senior lecturer, now suddenly a politician, Dr. Kapilan is accused of vanishing from academia mid-semester—leaving behind unchecked exam scripts, unfinished lectures, and abandoned research supervision, much to the frustration of students and faculty alike.

“For more than six months, papers remained unchecked, and students were left in limbo,” said a faculty member who wished to remain anonymous. Final-year students have reportedly suffered the most due to incomplete research supervision and halted coursework.

Adding fuel to the controversy is that Kapilan had previously been on paid academic leave for postgraduate studies. Critics argue that



after benefiting from public resources, his sudden departure has left both students and colleagues in disarray.

“It's about accountability,” said a student leader in a conversation with Jaffna Monitor. “He has every right to enter politics, but he should have completed the academic duties he promised. Leaving unfinished work behind to chase a big opportunity is nothing short of betrayal.”

“Whether he wins or loses is secondary,” added another academic. “What matters is the precedent being set. Can someone who walked away from their duty as a teacher be trusted to serve the public?”

With public scrutiny mounting, the spotlight now falls on whether Dr. Kapilan—or his NPP leadership—will address these concerns, or continue to let silence speak for them, as many in Jaffna accuse the NPP of doing since coming to power.

"Ethnic and Religious Nationalism Is Neither Democratic Nor Progressive - It Breeds Hatred and Authoritarianism"

Part 04

- LTTE Co-founder Ragavan
in an Exclusive Interview
with Jaffna Monitor

BY:

Our Special
Correspondent



He helped forge the iron of the LTTE, stood shoulder-to-shoulder with the infamous Prabhakaran in his early militant days, and witnessed the birth of a movement that would scar a nation-and, to some extent, the world.

Chinniah Rajeshkumar, better known as Ragavan, wasn't just a member; he was a co-founder-an architect of the early Tamil liberation struggle. But by April 1984, disillusioned by the rising tide of extremism, senseless violence, brutal internal power plays, and the almost religious cult surrounding Prabhakaran, Ragavan made a life-altering choice. He severed ties with the LTTE and sought refuge in London.

Now a legal advisor and activist, Ragavan carries the weight of history, the clarity of hindsight, and a deep understanding of the world's workings—especially the dynamics of left and right politics.

In this exclusive interview series with Jaffna Monitor, he breaks his silence, offering unparalleled insights into the tumultuous early days of the LTTE and the politics that shaped—and shattered—an era.

This compelling interview is being published in parts, each revealing a deeper layer of this extraordinary story.

Some critics argue that the LTTE was founded more as a revenge-driven organization rather than a true liberation movement. They claim that Prabhakaran was a mastermind of vengeance and that the LTTE lacked the profound ideological wisdom necessary to achieve the freedom of an ethnic group. How do you respond to this perspective?

I disagree. While vengeance played a role in decision-making, categorizing the LTTE solely as a revenge-driven organization would be an oversimplification. Revenge was part of a broader Tamil nationalist project, where unity and the notion of sole representation were central. Within this framework, a 'traitor' was seen as a greater threat than the enemy itself.

In the 1970s, young men who took up arms believed that the greatest enemies of Tamil liberation were Tamils aligned with the major southern political parties—the UNP and SLFP—as well as Tamil intelligence officers in the Sri Lankan police force. Consequently,

eliminating 'traitors' was seen as a necessary first step, with Tamil nationalists propagating the idea that "weeds" needed to be removed for a healthy crop to grow. Until the late 1970s, I too was convinced that 'traitors' had to be eliminated, as Tamil nationalist ideology had taken deep root in my mind.

In LTTE parlance, the term "traitor" soon became synonymous with dissenters and rival militant organizations. By 1986, the LTTE had completely lost its liberatory character, transforming into an authoritarian military structure. I believe this is the inherent nature of ethnic nationalism.

Could you elaborate on why you believe ethnic nationalism leads to authoritarianism and exclusion?

Ethnic nationalist movements, by their very nature, are exclusionary—both politically and culturally—inevitably leading to authoritarianism, fascism, and intolerance. In ethnic nationalist discourse, language and culture are depicted as unique, pure, and immutable.

As political scientist and historian Benedict Anderson observes, nationalism lacks philosophical depth, and yet it remains a powerful political force. A nation, he argues, is an imagined political community—constructed through cultural narratives—and is a modern phenomenon that emerged in late 18th-century Europe.

However, I see a fundamental difference between national liberation movements against colonialism or settler colonialism and ethnic nationalist movements. Anti-colonial liberation movements were generally inclusive. For example, during India's independence struggle, people from various ethnic and



religious backgrounds were encouraged to join.

I am not, however, generalizing that anti-colonial nationalist movements were entirely inclusive, as ethnic, caste, and religious factors often influenced the nationalist framework. For instance, Ambedkar and Periyar were skeptical of the Indian nationalist leadership due to the presence of Hindutva and Brahminical dominance within the Congress.

While Hindu nationalist tendencies did exist within the Indian National Congress—and organizations like the RSS openly promoted an exclusive Hindutva nationalism—leaders such as Gandhi, Nehru, Subhas Chandra Bose, and Bhagat Singh advocated for inclusivity.

Similarly, the African National Congress (ANC), under Nelson Mandela's leadership, championed an inclusive struggle, even

welcoming progressive individuals from the white settler colonial community into the liberation movement. South Africa, after all, was under apartheid rule imposed by white settler colonialists. That said, anti-colonial movements were not entirely free from ethnic, caste, or religious biases.

Sri Lanka, in contrast, lacked a strong anti-colonial movement. Independence was merely 'granted' by the British, resulting in the creation of an ethnocratic nation-state.

Sri Lanka's post-colonial nation-building project was shaped by Sinhala ethno-nationalism, which asserted that the entire island belonged exclusively to Sinhala Buddhists. The political imagination was that Sri Lanka was collectively owned by Sinhala Buddhists, leaving little space for minorities. In response to this ethnocratic state structure, Tamil ethno-nationalists asserted that the north and east were the traditional homelands of Tamils, collectively owned by them based on the modern construction of centuries of unique cultural and linguistic heritage.

When such notions of exclusive ownership became a political force, those perceived as outsiders were denied the right to live in these regions, they could be expelled, killed, or ethnically cleansed. This ideology justified anti-Tamil pogroms, during which Tamils were killed, beaten, and their properties destroyed.

Likewise, when Tamil ethno-nationalism gained dominance in the north and east, Sinhalese residents were expelled or killed by Tamil militants following the 1983 pogroms. The LTTE further reinforced this exclusivity when it became the dominant force after 1986, culminating in the ethnic cleansing of Muslims from the north in 1990. The moment Muslims sought to assert a separate identity,

they were cast as the ‘other.’

This leads me to an essential question: Can landless people—especially oppressed castes who were denied land rights for centuries and Malayaga Tamils, who have historically been denied land rights—invoke the idea of a traditional homeland?

My argument is that ethnic and religious nationalism is neither democratic nor progressive. It is inherently divisive, fostering hatred, suspicion, and authoritarianism. This is a crucial lesson from the Tamil nationalist struggle.

Did you and the early militants who took up arms have the understanding and vision to achieve liberation for the minority community and build a nation?

Prabhakaran, I, and many others initially believed we were merely igniting the struggle—it was up to the next generation to carry it forward. We saw our actions as a spark, a catalyst rather than a complete movement.

However, a complex historical trajectory eventually led to the formation of a Tamil national liberation army.

In 1977, Sri Lanka transitioned to a neoliberal, market-oriented economy, abandoning its earlier state-controlled economic policies and principles aligned with the Non-Aligned Movement. This shift—heavily influenced by Western neoliberal ideology—involved liberalization, privatization, and the opening of the economy to foreign investment.



India, which had traditionally aligned itself with socialist countries and played a leading role in the Non-Aligned Movement, viewed Sri Lanka's realignment with the West as a geopolitical threat to regional security.

There is a widespread myth that neoliberalism and democratic norms go hand in hand. In reality, neoliberalism frequently coexists with authoritarianism. For instance, in 1973—amid Cold War tensions—Chile became a testing ground for neoliberal economic reforms. The Augusto Pinochet regime crushed political opposition, suppressed trade unions, and was responsible for widespread torture, killings, and disappearances. Indigenous lands were expropriated and handed over to corporations and wealthy elites.

Pinochet's authoritarian rule, paired with neoliberalism, was seen as essential for fundamentally reshaping national politics and culture. While Western powers championed democracy and human rights at home, they actively supported Pinochet's regime abroad.

A similar pattern emerged in Sri Lanka during the mid-1970s. Neoliberalism was introduced under the veneer of democracy, while trade unions were weakened and authoritarianism was institutionalized. The creation of the executive presidency and the introduction of repressive laws such as the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA)—primarily used to arrest, torture, and detain Tamil youths—marked this transition.

India, recognizing the rising discontent among Tamils, sought to capitalize on it by supporting Tamil militant groups as a strategic tool—to exert pressure on Colombo and to influence the unfolding conflict.

The 1983 state-sponsored anti-Tamil pogrom

became a turning point. The violence dramatically increased recruitment into militant groups. Tamil support for militancy was less a product of ideological conviction and more a visceral reaction to state violence. Many Tamil youths, radicalized by the pogrom, saw armed struggle as the only viable path to securing a homeland.

India played a critical role in this phase, by training, arming, and funding Tamil militant groups—decisively shaping the trajectory of the armed resistance. The LTTE eventually emerged as the most powerful among them, positioning itself as the sole representative of the Tamil people. The rest is history.

Some political analysts argue that if leftist democratic forces had led the Sri Lankan Tamil movement against the Sinhala-dominated government, the outcome would have been different. What is your perspective on this view?

They mistakenly assume that the right to self-determination applies universally to all national liberation struggles. Lenin's concept of the national question must be understood within its specific historical and imperialist context.

According to Lenin, one aspect concerned Russian imperialism and the oppression of nationalities within the empire; the other focused on colonial imperialism and anti-colonial nationalist struggles.

While he supported the right to self-determination to weaken imperialism, his ultimate goal was a socialist revolution. He warned against unconditional support for all

nationalist movements and urged Marxists to distinguish between revolutionary and reactionary nationalism.

In Sri Lanka's case, applying Lenin's principle to Tamil ethnic nationalism amounts to endorsing an exclusive and reactionary form of nationalism. Sri Lanka is not an imperialist power in itself but rather functions as an agent of imperialism.

As political philosopher Frantz Fanon observed, the national bourgeoisie in post-colonial states often serve as proxies for Western capital—indulging in decadence while failing to fulfill their historic role of driving genuine national development. Sri Lanka's current economic crisis and the elite's misappropriation of public funds only reinforce Fanon's warning.

Globalization has intensified such exploitation. Garment workers in Free Trade Zones, for instance, face long hours, poor pay, and union-busting tactics—despite the sector generating nearly \$6 billion in exports.

Malayaga Tamils in plantations continue to struggle for a basic wage of 1,000 rupees a day. Likewise, domestic workers in the Middle East suffer abuse and low wages. These forms of exploitation cut across ethnic lines, though certain sectors remain ethnically concentrated.

Meanwhile, land appropriation in the name of development has deepened landlessness and environmental degradation. Both Sinhala and Tamil nationalists often ignore these systemic issues and are trapped in romanticized pasts. What we need is resistance that transcends ethnicity and unites people across class, caste, and gender.

The traditional left's approach—treating

Lenin's principle as sacred doctrine—fails to account for evolving socio-political realities. In practice, the Tamil nationalist struggle and the demand for self-determination have not fostered a space where democratic socialist norms and values can flourish.

Instead, class unity has been deeply fragmented by both Sinhala and Tamil ethnic nationalisms, as well as by the ethnocratic nature of the state. The result has been the emergence of an authoritarian state and the authoritarianism of the LTTE.

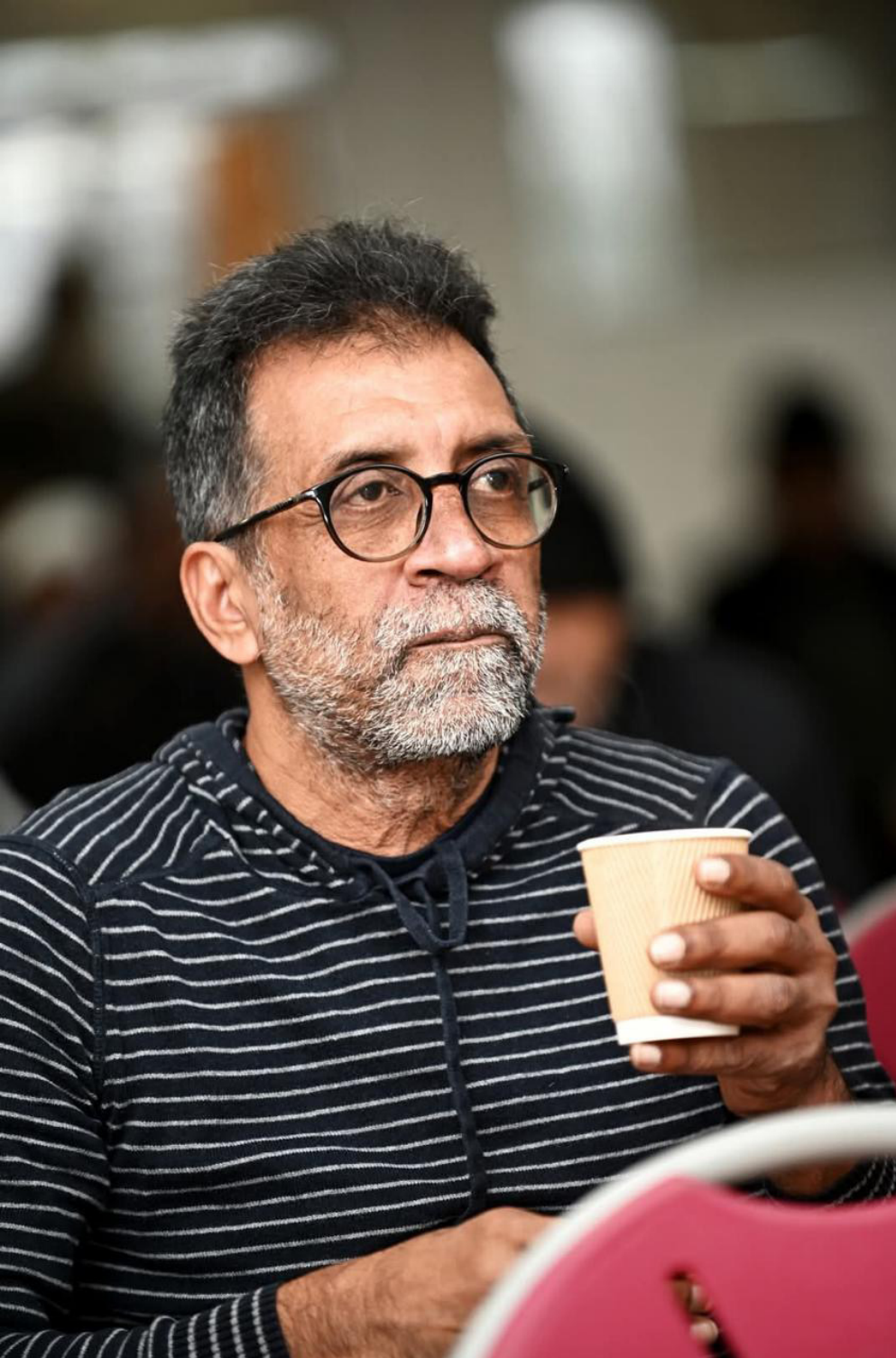
Political strategy must evolve in response to material conditions, rather than remain bound to outdated conceptual frameworks.

Today, national sovereignty itself is challenged by neoliberal globalization. Borders—national, cultural, and political—are increasingly fluid. Yet some leftists in the South continue to advocate self-determination without rigorous analysis, seeing the Tamil issue as something for Tamils alone. This reflects both intellectual laziness and a lack of class analysis.

Some Tamil leftists claim that had the movement been led by leftist forces, it would have been more inclusive. But their worldview remains essentially nationalist, cloaked in socialist language. What's missing is a commitment to socialism's core values: human emancipation, justice, and democracy.

Ethnic nationalism promotes ideas of uniqueness and purity, which are fundamentally at odds with pluralism and democratic norms. In ethnic nationalist discourse, the denial of the right to dissent is intertwined with the depoliticization of the masses.

It disregards class, caste, and gender divisions,



promoting ethnic unity at the expense of broader goals of social justice. Groups like the EPRLF, EROS, and NLFT attempted to merge ethnic nationalism with class struggle, arguing that Tamil national liberation was a necessary first step toward socialism. However, this framework was fundamentally flawed. Their failure stemmed not from weak leadership, but from the inherent contradiction between ethnic nationalism and inclusive leftist politics.

Tamil nationalist discourse portrayed Tamils as a unified whole, silencing internal differences and enabling the

LTTE to centralize power. Believing that a left-led Tamil movement would have changed the outcome is, in my view, wishful thinking.

Instead, we must learn from the Aragalaya, which emerged during the recent economic crisis. As Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci observed, “It may be ruled out that the immediate economic crises of themselves produce fundamental historical events; they can simply create a terrain more favorable to the dissemination of certain modes of thought and certain ways of posing and resolving questions involving the entire subsequent development of national life.”

For the first time in post-independence Sri Lanka, an economic crisis gave rise to a political consciousness rooted in cross-ethnic unity.

Yet the Aragalaya was not confined to minority concerns. Its vision emphasized people’s democracy, social justice, redistribution, and equal access to education, employment, and healthcare. It represented a call for an inclusive political future.

This is only a beginning, but it offers a potential path forward. We must build on the

counter-hegemonic discourse that emerged during the Aragalaya while recognizing that categories like ethnicity are historically constructed—not fixed. Unity cannot be achieved by ignoring differences, but by acknowledging and working through them.

A former early member of the LTTE mentioned that you were the only person he ever saw smoking a cigarette in front of Prabhakaran, suggesting that, in the early days, he was not perceived as a supreme figure within the organization. In your view, when did Prabhakaran transition from being a friend and companion to an object of reverence? Did you notice any early signs of this transformation within the LTTE?

In the initial days, although Prabhakaran prohibited smoking, those who were already smokers were allowed to continue. I was a smoker, along with a few others such as Patkunam, Ravi, and Matthaya. We were given a ration of five cigarettes per day.

Until I left the organization, Prabhakaran treated me as a companion. However, from 1980 onwards, I began to question the LTTE's ideology, which made him view me as a problematic figure. He expected unquestioning loyalty, but I believe he still had a soft spot for me, as I had provided him protection during the 1970s when he lacked widespread support.

After 1983, he emerged as a ruthless, charismatic, and authoritarian leader. I don't see this as a sudden transformation but rather as a process. However, it was difficult for me to

address him as "leader."

Let me share a humorous anecdote. After the 1983 pogroms, several Tamil youths from Germany, the UK, and France traveled to India to join the militant organizations. Among them was a man named Bahi. By then, Prabhakaran had assumed the title of supreme leader and was addressed as Thalaivar by the new recruits, while most senior members still called him Thambi (younger brother). Bahi, unsure of how to strike a balance between respect and familiarity, coined the term 'Thalaivar Thambi Anna' (Leader–Younger Brother–Elder Brother).

As I mentioned in the first part of my interview, by the early 1980s, Prabhakaran had already begun to perceive himself as the embodiment of Tamil Eelam—almost as if he were destined to achieve it. While he never explicitly stated this, his actions made it clear that he believed he alone could create Tamil Eelam, and that, regardless of the odds, he would carve it out through sheer determination. After 1983, with the expansion of militancy, he became an even more ruthless, authoritarian, and charismatic leader.

Before 1983, the LTTE was a small organization. While it carried out assassinations of 'traitors' and police officers, it was not a formidable force, and Prabhakaran was not widely known. Yet, within the LTTE, he had already begun asserting himself as the undisputed leader. The rapid expansion of the LTTE and other militant groups after 1983, coupled with Indian training and support, brought them into the public spotlight.

The LTTE and other militant groups actively engaged in propaganda, publishing official newspapers. This outreach made Tamils in Sri Lanka increasingly aware of the militant

organizations, leading to greater financial and logistical support. At this juncture, militant leaders gained official recognition.

Both local and international media—especially Indian media—began covering the militant movements and their leaders. Their interviews were published along with their photographs, making them recognizable figures. Prabhakaran was meticulous about his public image; he would have multiple photos taken and carefully select the best one for publication.

In early 1984, I had a conversation with Balasingham about the LTTE's internal repression and undemocratic practices. He acknowledged these issues and told me that until 1983, Prabhakaran was merely a chieftain. However, as the number of cadres grew and his prominence increased, he suddenly became a king. To maintain control and assert his authority, Prabhakaran resorted to intensifying internal repression and consolidating authoritarianism to its full extent.

The LTTE, in many ways, was a product of the society from which it emerged. Tamil society had deeply entrenched caste hierarchies and a long history of gender oppression, with power traditionally concentrated in the hands of dominant-caste men. Similarly, the patriarchal family structure reinforced male dominance in social, cultural, and political spheres. I believe this mindset shaped the structure and functioning of the LTTE as well.

The idea of one leader, one ideology, and one movement may have been



an extension of the hierarchical and patriarchal tendencies of Tamil society, reinforced by ethnic nationalist discourse. Over time, this belief system elevated Prabhakaran into an unquestionable supreme leader. And he did not resist this transformation—he fully embraced it.

Early members of the LTTE, including Anton Master—the then Military Office Chief ‘of the LTTE—told us that within the organization, loyalty to Prabhakaran was prioritized over talent. Those who praised him and remained loyal were given preference over individuals with genuine talent and commitment. What is your take on this?

It is a mix of loyalty and competence. Prabhakaran always placed utmost importance on personal loyalty. According to his perception, the leader and the movement are two sides of the same coin. Loyalty to him was equated with loyalty to the organization itself.

However, as a military organization, the LTTE could not function solely based on loyalty—it also required competence and strategic acumen. For instance, Baby Subramaniam was deeply devoted to Prabhakaran, but in my view, he did not possess the necessary leadership skills to build and manage a structured military command. He may have had other strengths, but he was never appointed to a high-ranking position to lead the LTTE's armed unit.

Conversely, individuals like Karuna,

Theepan, and Balraj were both unwaveringly loyal to Prabhakaran and highly skilled military commanders. Their rise within the organization was not purely due to their allegiance; their battlefield expertise, strategic thinking, and leadership capabilities also played a crucial role in their prominence.

One of the major allegations against you is that you were expelled from the LTTE due to your love for your wife, Nirmala. Some claim that this was the reason for your departure. What is the truth?

The claim that I was expelled due to my relationship with Nirmala is factually incorrect. When I left the LTTE in April 1984,



Ragavan with his wife Nirmala

Nirmala was still imprisoned in Batticaloa prison and I had never even met her. I had only met her first husband, Nithiyanandan, in India.

During the Batticaloa jailbreak in September 1983, Nithiyanandan and others managed to escape, but Nirmala was left behind as she was held in the women's section. In June 1984, the LTTE carried out a separate prison break specifically to free her. By that time, I was no longer part of the movement. My relationship with Nirmala began only after I had left the LTTE, and after she too had left the organization at the end of 1984.

The truth is that neither Prabhakaran, any key figures within the LTTE, nor the LTTE as an institution ever made such an allegation against me officially.

When serious criticisms were directed at the LTTE, and they were unable to provide a logical response, their primary strategy was character assassination. When it came to women, such slander often took on a particularly vicious and sexualized nature. While the LTTE itself never officially engaged in spreading falsehoods about me or Nirmala, they also made no effort to counter or refute the disinformation spread in their name by LTTE supporters.

Another relevant point—Prabhakaran's wife, Mathivathani, was in love with a fellow student before she and her friends were abducted by the LTTE while on a hunger strike to death. What is undeniable is that she later distanced herself from her former lover and fell in love with Prabhakaran. Prabhakaran indeed loved Mathivathani, and she reciprocated those feelings.

Falling in love is natural. But if someone accuses me of wrongfully loving a woman who

was married, then by the same logic, couldn't one argue that Prabhakaran falling in love with Mathivathani—who was still in love with someone else at the time—was also wrong? I am not making a moral judgment here, but those who criticize me on these grounds should not throw stones from a glasshouse.

After the LTTE split in 1979, although I supported Prabhakaran, I began to reflect on the ideological nature of the movement. While I was a nationalist at the time, I started questioning whether the organization's intolerance of criticism and authoritarianism aligned with the principles of a true liberation movement.

In 1982, after the Pondy Bazaar shooting, I wrote a detailed letter to Anton Balasingham, expressing my concerns about the LTTE's trajectory and how it was veering off course. I was later informed by Balasingham that LTTE supporters in the UK had discussed my concerns and had kept that letter for a long time. However, as I mentioned earlier, after the events of 1983, there was no longer any space for political discussion. That said, I acknowledge my moral responsibility for all the actions committed by the LTTE until 1984, as I was a part of the organization during that period.

Now, let me clarify the reasons for my departure from the organization. The real reason I left the LTTE was that it had fully evolved into an extreme personality cult, devoid of internal democracy, and had become increasingly violent in its internal structure. Any other explanations given for my departure are simply false.

Did Prabhakaran force Mathivathani to love him?

No, no—not at all. Their love developed naturally, and their relationship evolved organically. There was no coercion involved. However, there was an element of power as Prabhakaran was a leader.

There are still lingering allegations that it was Prabhakaran-not the Sri Lankan forces-who killed Sellakili during the 1983 ambush that triggered the bloody ethnic violence. Some early LTTE members have told Jaffna Monitor that Sellakili may not have died from army bullets but from Prabhakaran's own gunfire-possibly because he was seen as a potential threat to Prabhakaran's leadership. How credible do you find these allegations? You were still in the LTTE at the time-what is your perspective on what really happened?

I believe it's incorrect to say that the 1983 ambush triggered the ethnic violence. The University Teachers for Human Rights (Jaffna) [UTHR(J)] reported that, in the weeks leading up to the Black July violence of 1983, the government had already been preparing to unleash massive force against Tamils. The ambush was used merely as a convenient starting point. Tamil addresses had been collected in advance, and it was a meticulously planned operation orchestrated by ministers like Cyril Mathew, who had even organized a private army. Several credible sources confirm that the 1983 pogrom was premeditated and that the JR government aided and abetted its execution.

Regarding the question of Sellakili's death, I

cannot confirm that LTTE leader Prabhakaran personally shot and killed him. However, there was suspicion that Prabhakaran may have ordered his execution.

I was not part of the LTTE at the time. In fact, after the Pandy Bazaar shooting in 1982, I became increasingly disillusioned with the LTTE's militaristic and authoritarian direction and decided to remain in India.

Although I had initially planned to escape on bail with Prabhakaran and return to Sri Lanka, we had an argument before the escape. I told him that targeting PLOTE leaders was wrong and that we should instead negotiate with them to work together for a common cause. I even suggested holding a meeting with all LTTE members and, if the majority agreed that Umamaheswaran should be killed, I would carry out the task myself. But Prabhakaran rejected my proposal and stated that even if everyone opposed killing Umamaheswaran, he would still go ahead and do it himself. As a result, I chose not to accompany him to Sri Lanka. After escaping on bail, I remained underground in India and was inactive until the 1983 pogrom.

However, after the 1983 pogrom, I decided to re-engage with the LTTE. One member who had participated in the ambush (whom I will refer to as X, as he is still alive and it would be inappropriate to name him without his consent—he left the LTTE in 1984) told me that he suspected Sellakili was killed either by Kittu or Lala Ranjan. He said that Sellakili had a sexual relationship with a woman who became pregnant and that Prabhakaran decided to have him killed because of it.

It was an open secret within the organization that Sellakili had multiple sexual partners, even in the nascent years of the movement around 1977–78. Almost all of them were



Sellakilli and Prabhakaran at Udayarkaddu Training Camp, 1983

married women. Prabhakaran was aware of this but never commented on it—he seemed to tolerate Sellakili's behavior. However, the woman who became pregnant was unmarried. I believe she was a university student. I gathered that this issue became a talking point, and therefore, in order to preserve the 'purity' of the organization, Prabhakaran must have felt compelled to take action against Sellakili.

According to X, Sellakili was the driver of the vehicle on the day of the ambush. Before the operation, he parked the vehicle, gave instructions to another member on how to start it, and handed over the keys. X noted that this was unusual, as Sellakili would never typically entrust the keys to anyone. He believed that Sellakili may have been suspicious of the possibility of "friendly fire."

In any case, Prabhakaran had a mindset of eliminating 'problematic' members on the

battlefield. When he was close to me, he shared his ideas openly. If a member failed to follow LTTE discipline or held differing views, rather than allowing them to leave the organization—potentially creating a "traitor" or enemy—it was considered preferable to send them into battle. If they were not killed by the enemy, they could be eliminated by one of Prabhakaran's trusted members, who would never reveal the truth. In fact, increasing the number of martyrs was seen as more beneficial than increasing the number of traitors, as it served the LTTE's reputation and legacy. That was Prabhakaran's logic.

Given the circumstantial evidence, there is a possibility that Sellakili might have been killed by 'friendly fire.' However, I cannot confirm this without concrete proof.

It is interesting to note that when Prabhakaran fell in love with Mathivathani, she became pregnant before their marriage, which took place on October 1, 1984. Their son, Charles Anthony, was born on April 18, 1985—just over six months later. This means Mathivathani was already around two and a half months pregnant at the time of the wedding.

I leave it to the readers to contemplate the double standards involved. I want to emphasize that this is not an attempt at character assassination or a moral judgment, but rather an observation of the contradictions within the movement's leadership.

To Be Continued...

Straight Drive to Modi: Jayasuriya Bats for an International Cricket Stadium in Jaffna



Sri Lanka's 1996 World Cup-winning cricket team with Prime Minister Narendra Modi

While our Tamil parliamentarians from Jaffna are busy engaging in hair-pulling political brawls—almost as if they're auditioning for a village tournament—former Sri Lankan cricket captain and current national team coach Sanath Jayasuriya, who was once dismissed by our Tamil nationalist leaders for his closeness to former President Mahinda Rajapaksa, has quietly hit a diplomatic six out of the stadium—one that could change the sporting history of Jaffna and Sri Lankan Tamils.

During Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's recent visit to Colombo, Jayasuriya stepped up to the crease—as he always does to smash a massive six—and made a direct appeal: he requested India's support for building an international cricket stadium in Jaffna. If this materializes, it could rewrite the sporting narrative of Jaffna, while fostering reconciliation, youth empowerment, and national unity.

The request was made during a special meeting between Prime Minister Modi and members of Sri Lanka's iconic 1996 Cricket World Cup-winning team, including Aravinda de Silva, Chaminda Vaas, Marvan Atapattu, Kumara Dharmasena, Upul Chandana, Romesh Kaluwitharana, Ravindra Pushpakumara, and Sanath Jayasuriya himself.

Speaking during the interaction, Jayasuriya said: "As the coach of the Sri Lankan team, we play matches across the country—but not in Jaffna. If India could assist in building an international cricket stadium there, it would be a tremendous boost for the youth of the Northern and Eastern Provinces. It would bring them closer to the national cricketing fold and help unify our nation through sport."

In response, Prime Minister Modi reaffirmed his support, saying, "Your idea of hosting international matches in Jaffna is powerful. I assure you, my team will do everything possible to support it."

The meeting also featured warm reminiscences of Sri Lanka's 1996 World Cup campaign, with Prime Minister Modi describing the team as early adopters of the modern T20-style aggressive gameplay—a likely nod to the fearless opening duo of Sanath Jayasuriya and Romesh Kaluwitharana, who tried to smash every ball over the boundary and pile up massive runs within the initial overs. As one sports writer once put it, they batted like every match was about to end in the next over... or like they'd just gotten a text from their girlfriend saying, "Babe, my parents aren't home."

Later, speaking to the media, Jayasuriya described the meeting as "inspiring," saying: "We spoke about cricket—past, present, and future—and also about how Sri Lanka could progress like India. It was a great experience."

If realized, the international stadium in Jaffna could well stand as a symbol of national healing and regional collaboration. And who knows—maybe one day it will produce a world-class cricketer from Jaffna, someone like Sanath



Sanath Jayasuriya in Jaffna: After meeting Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Sanath Jayasuriya, together with Sri Lanka's Sports Minister Sunil Gamage, visited the proposed site for the Jaffna International Cricket Stadium in Mandaitheevu. He met Northern coaches and talent scouts, expressing his hope to one day see a cricketer from the North proudly represent Sri Lanka. "We're committed to supporting the game's growth in the region," he said, noting the encouraging presence of Northern youth in the Sri Lanka U-19 setup.

Jayasuriya, who in turn might meet a future Prime Minister of India and request a sporting facility in a rural Sinhala village.

If sport can't unite a nation that has been torn apart, what else can? =



Ending the Easter Attack Conspiracy Theory



BY:
Professor Rohan Gunaratna

Sri Lanka's most catastrophic terrorist attack continues to be exploited for personal and political gains. Sri Lanka will mark the sixth anniversary of the Easter Sunday massacre on April 21, 2025. Sri Lanka's most powerful religious leader Malcolm Cardinal Ranjith has issued an ultimatum to the incumbent government to deliver justice for the victims of the Easter Sunday attack. If not, the Cardinal threatens to stage mass protests that will compromise social, political and economic stability.

Four successive Sri Lankan leaders and their governments could not convince the Cardinal of the truth. Relentless in his campaign, his influence contributed appreciably to ousting presidents Maithripala Sirisena, Gotabhaya Rajapaksa, and Ranil Wickramasinghe. Will manipulation of the facts of the Easter Sunday massacre destabilise the current government too?

Today, the Cardinal is on a collision course with President Anura Kumara Dissanayake. If President Dissanayake too fails to convince the leader of the Catholic community of the truth, he will be the fourth Sri Lankan leader to face the wrath of the Cardinal. Both the domestic and foreign investigations have concluded that the attack was staged by Muslim religious extremists. Their findings are consistent with the global trend where over 90% of the acts of terrorism are staged by Muslim religious extremists. There is nothing wrong with Islam but with Muslims who misinterpret their faith for political and personal gain. In Sri Lanka, it is time for the people to understand the party politics and the politicians that have gravely damaged Sri Lanka's unity and harmony. It is time to stop playing dirty politics and disclose to the nation, the key findings of the Easter Sunday massacre.

Easter Attack Investigations

In a democracy, if justice for the Easter Sunday victims is to be delivered, it should be based on evidence and not conspiracy. After extensive investigations and research, I wrote, "Sri Lanka's Easter Sunday Massacre - Lessons to be Learnt" to set the record straight. Having interviewed the leadership of the Islamic State Sri Lanka Branch, I also interviewed Abdul Kader Fatima Hadiya, the widow of Mohammed Hashim Mohammed Zahran. I also interviewed Zahran's deputy and his successor Mohamed Ibrahim Mohamed Naufer and its military wing leader Hayatu Mohamed Ahmed Milhan. Both remain in custody. They have all admitted to the attack and I have documented in detail what they have said to me and to both the Sri Lankan and foreign investigators. There is no inconsistency in the findings by the Sri Lankan and foreign investigators. The disparity lies in how certain politicians have misinterpreted and misrepresented the facts surrounding the Easter attack. Additionally, a group of YouTubers, clergymen, and NGO activists have propagated distorted narratives and unfounded theories. The following excerpts from my book respond to these false claims and aim to challenge the narratives put forth by conspiracy theorists.

The Easter attack is one of the most thoroughly investigated terrorist attacks in the world. After the 9/11 attack by Al Qaeda and the October 7, 2023 attack by Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, Sri Lanka's Easter Sunday attack by the Islamic State is the world's third worst terrorist attack. The world witnessed savagery because the perpetrators deliberately butchered civilians. The attackers distorted Islam, invoked Allah, and killed, maimed and injured innocent civilians.



Rohan Gunaratna interviewing the Islamic State leader Noufer, the successor of Zahran



Rohan Gunaratna interviewing Hadiya, widow of Zahran, the founding leader of the Islamic State in Sri Lanka



Milhan, the military wing leader of the Islamic State in Sri Lanka

Successive Sri Lankan governments have established fact-finding bodies to better understand the attack. Accordingly, special committees and boards have been appointed by the government to investigate and report on matters relevant to the Easter attack. Both local and foreign government authorities investigated and reported their findings.

Local mechanisms

1. Report of the Special Three-Member Inquiry Panel on the Easter Sunday Attacks (June 10, 2019)
2. Report of the Parliamentary Select Committee on the Easter Sunday Attacks (October 23, 2019)
3. Report of the Parliamentary Sectoral Oversight Committee on National Security (February 19, 2020)
4. Report of the Presidential Special Commission of Inquiry into the Easter Sunday Bombings, Volume 1 (January 31, 2021)
5. Report of the Cabinet Ministerial Sub-Committee appointed on the implementation of the recommendations of the Presidential Commission on the Easter Sunday Attacks and the Oversight Committee on National Security (April 05, 2021)
6. Report of the Committee to investigate the facts of the program broadcast on Channel 4 regarding the Easter Sunday bombings (June 25, 2024)
7. Report of the Committee of Inquiry appointed under the chairmanship of retired Judge A.N.J. Alwis on Intelligence Coordination and Investigations into the Easter Sunday Bombings (September 14,

2024)

In addition, law enforcement authorities notably the Police conducted investigations. The Counter-Terrorism and Investigation Division and the Criminal Investigation Department arrested about a hundred individuals and initiated legal proceedings.

Furthermore, on January 12, 2023, a seven-judge bench of the Supreme Court delivered a landmark judgment concerning the Easter Sunday attacks. These fundamental rights cases were filed to examine how various public officials fulfilled their duties before and during the bombings on April 21, 2019. Those found responsible included Maithripala Sirisena (then President), Hemasiri Fernando (Secretary to the Ministry of Defence), Pujith Jayasundara (Inspector General of Police), Sisira Mendis (Chief of National Intelligence), and Nilantha Jayawardena (Director, State Intelligence Service), all of whom were ordered to pay compensation.

However, Muslim politicians who ignored the growing threat of radicalisation, and religious leaders who failed to safeguard the sanctity of religious spaces, have yet to be held accountable.

Foreign investigations

The Sri Lanka Police launched a comprehensive investigation into the Easter Sunday bombings. The Criminal Investigation Department expanded this into an international investigation to identify all perpetrators involved. Accordingly, foreign authorities including Scotland Yard, Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), Australian Federal Police (AFP), India's National Investigation Agency (NIA), Maldives Police Service, and Interpol have cooperated and assisted the Sri Lanka Police.



M. R. M. Thaslim was shot by Milhan, the head of the Islamic State military wing, after he assisted the police and preempted an islandwide attack in Sri Lanka

Additionally, individual foreign countries have conducted independent investigations, published certain reports, filed charges, and pursued legal action.

1. United States of America

At the invitation of and with the permission from the Sri Lankan government, a team of FBI officials visited Sri Lanka in April 2019. The team included technical and forensic analysts with specialized equipment. Following investigations conducted jointly by the United States FBI and Sri Lanka, with assistance from the Attorney General's Department of Sri Lanka, the United States Federal Court in Los Angeles has indicted the following suspects, who are currently in custody in Sri Lanka, for nine crimes under United States law (including conspiracy, aiding, abetting, training, and providing assistance) in the attacks targeting tourist hotels that killed five American citizens and other foreigners:

- i. Mohamed Ibrahim Mohamed Naufer
- ii. Mohammed Anwar Mohammed Rizkan
- iii. Hayatu Mohamed Ahmed Milhan

Additionally, as a result of judicial proceedings connected to the Easter Sunday bombings investigation, on October 9, 2020, the US Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) imposed sanctions on Lukman Talib, an Australian resident of Sri Lanka, and his company, Talib and Sons, through Executive Order (EO) 13224, for providing support to the terrorist organization Al Qaeda. This company, based in Melbourne, Australia, has been proven to have provided support to terrorist organizations including Al Qaeda using wealth earned under the guise of conducting gem businesses in Sri Lanka, Brazil, Colombia, Tanzania, Turkey, and the Gulf region.

2. Australia

The Australian government has taken legal action against three Australians of Sri Lankan origin who had links to the Easter attackers and confiscated their assets. Australian investigative services have provided assistance to Sri Lankan authorities. Under Operation Geldrop, 15 investigators arrived in the country in April and May 2019, conducted joint investigations with the Sri Lanka Police, and submitted their final reports.

3. Maldives

Maldivian nationals with links to the Easter attackers have been identified during initial investigations. The Jamaat-e-Islami cell received from Maldives Islamic State cell to buy a lathe machine to manufacture weapons. It is the same cell that vandalised Buddhist, Christian, and Hindu images, attempted to assassinate M.R.M. Thaslim, a patriotic Muslim who assisted the police, and leased the property in Vanathavillu where Zahran established his weapons manufacturing and training base. Legal action is likely to be taken against these individuals following joint investigations by Maldivian intelligence officers and investigators.

What is the truth?

All local and international investigations have clearly established that the Easter Sunday attack was carried out by the Sri Lankan branch of the Islamic State. The groups aligned with the Islamic State included Jamaat-e-Islami and Salafi-Wahhabi factions. Notably, no local or traditional Muslim groups joined Zahran, who lived in a segregated Muslim enclave. There was no integration—only isolation. The attack could have been both prevented and preempted. However, due to critical weaknesses in the state's national security apparatus, the terrorists succeeded.

Such a horrific attack in an island nation like Sri Lanka shocked and angered the general public. Despite facts confirmed by numerous local and international investigations, various conspiracy theories have been promoted. The findings have been politicized and the facts have been suppressed, either intentionally or unintentionally.

It appears that baseless or weakly substantiated

conspiracy theories have gained popularity. Unfortunately, 53% of Sri Lankans believe local political forces were involved in the Easter Sunday attacks carried out in 2019, according to a survey commissioned in October by Syndicated Surveys, a survey instrument by Verité Research, a credible think tank led by Nishan de Mel. Only 8% believed that it was carried out without the involvement of local political forces. A high percentage, 39%, said they have no opinion or refused to comment. The findings demonstrated that Sri Lanka has no capable public information plan, approach, and strategy to educate its own citizenry. Another aspect was that most of the Easter Sunday attack fact-finding reports are in English. Today, a majority of Sri Lankans cannot read, write, or speak in English.

A far-reaching government should develop an effective public communications system to debunk misinformation and disinformation. Otherwise, if fake news dominates the information space, the next generation of Sri Lankans will be driven by false narratives and conspiracy theories. One narrative that gained traction and was debunked pertained to Sara Jasmine. Anti-Indian Sri Lankan Muslim politicians promoted the conspiracy theory that India's foreign intelligence service was behind the Easter Sunday attack and the Research and Analysis Wing recruited as an agent Sarah Jasmine, a convert to Islam.

Was Indian intelligence behind the attack?

While Sarah Jasmine committed suicide in the Saindamarudu explosion, a false narrative was promoted that she fled to India. Samples for DNA testing were taken on three occasions regarding the individuals who died in the bomb blast at the Saindamarudu house on April 26, 2019.

Shaykh Abu Ubaiṭha

the Amir of Istishhadi knights

Who Wrecked Havoc on the Crusaders in Srilanka

Shaykh Shaheed Abu Ubaiṭha (Rahimahullah) was born and brought up in Kaathankudi in Srilanka. He had immense love for jihad and zeal for Ummah from his childhood, as he bore enmity towards the kuffar and the mushrikin. Shaykh Abu Ubaiṭha (Rahimahullah) along with 800 mujahidin pledged allegiance to the Amir al-Muminin as-Shaykh Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi (Rahimahullah), former leader of the Islamic State.

Some of the mujahidin and their families made hijrah. The rest of mujahidin formed a Shura council and nominated Shaykh Abu Ubaiṭha (Rahimahullah) as their Amir and conducted many operations. In those operations, 18 kuffars, including police officers, were killed. By the grace of Allah, they wanted to avenge the Muslims killed due to the indiscriminate bombardment of the Crusaders in Baghuz in Sham.

The jama'ah of the mujahidin decided to carry out an istishhadi operation in the churches and hotels in Srilanka, and the Amir selected, in addition to him, 7 other members for the blessed istishhadi operation, who were: Abul Mukhtar, Abul Haleel, Abu Hamza, Abu Bar'a, Abu Muhammad, Abu 'Abdullah, Abu 'Umar. With success from Allah, the istishhadi operation was successfully conducted by the aforementioned mujahidin.



Islamic State acknowledged its Sri Lanka branch leader Zahran Hashim as being responsible for the Easter Sunday attack

Forensic specialist Dr. Ruweera Nadira conducted tests at the Ampara General Hospital and obtained the first 26 DNA samples on April 28-29, 2019. The bodies were cremated on May 2, 2019. The DNA samples were handed over to the Government Analyst's Department on May 8, 2019.

Due to the deterioration of 11 of the 26 samples, those bodies were recovered on June 7, 2019, on court orders, and 11 new samples were handed over to the Government Analyst's Department.

Sarah Jasmine's mother's blood samples were also sent to the forensic scientist to test against the body parts.

The Government Analyst's reports regarding the DNA

samples were received on September 9, 2019, November 15, 2019, and March 3, 2021. However, there was no match with the DNA of Sarah Jasmine's mother.

Against this backdrop, various opinions created a social debate on this issue. The main reason was that a personal informant of Chief Inspector Arjun Mahin Kanda, an investigating officer of the Presidential Commission of Inquiry, provided information to the Commission, and accordingly, two eyewitnesses presented evidence that Sarah Jasmine had fled to India.

Based on that evidence, Police Inspector Nagur Thambi Abubakkar, attached to the Transport Division of the Ampara Police Division, was arrested by the Colombo Crimes Division on July 11, 2020, on suspicion of having helped Sarah Jasmine escape. Subsequently, a case was filed against him in the High Court.

The CID conducted further investigations to determine whether Sarah Jasmine was living in Sri Lanka or had fled to another country. During these investigations, contradictions were observed in the testimonies of individuals who claimed Sarah Jasmine had fled, and there was no corroborating evidence.

Accordingly, it was decided to once again take samples from all buried bodies and remains.

On May 7, 2021, with court permission, the Government



A photo published on the Islamic State terror group's propaganda outlet, the Amaq agency, on April 23, 2019, showing what the group says is eight bombers who carried out the Easter attacks in Sri Lanka

Analyst's Department, under the leadership of the Criminal Investigation Department, the Counter-Terrorism and Investigation Division, the Colombo Crimes Division, and other judicial officers, conducted an investigation with Zahran's widow, Abdul Kader Fatima Hadiya, who was present at the house during the bombing.

On February 15, 2023, the Government Analytical Department reported that 83 DNA samples, covering all buried body parts recovered on April 27, 2022, matched the DNA of Sarah's mother. Therefore, forensic reports have confirmed that Sarah Jasmine died in the explosion at the Saindamarudu house on April 26, 2019.

Was Sri Lankan military behind the attack?

Another conspiracy theory that harmed Sri Lanka's image and reputation was an Easter bombings program aired by Channel 4. Based

on a Muslim asylum seeker Channel 4 claimed that former Director General of the State Intelligence Service, Suresh Salley, had been in contact with Zahran Hashim.

No commission report or any local or foreign investigation conducted to date has mentioned any connection between Major General Suresh Salley and Zahran. Rejecting the allegations against Major General Salley, a Sri Lankan government investigation led by Justice Syed Ishrat Imam stated:

'Salley's alibi is an irreversible fact. There is no evidence at all to show any involvement on the part of Salley with Zahran or the members of the National Tawheed Jamaat, whose mission in life is death during the aforesaid period and thereafter.

The report further examines the truthfulness of allegations, based on statements made by a Criminal Investigation Department investigator regarding facts presented by

Hansir Maulana to the Channel 4 program:

"Atugodagedera Vijithakumara Wijayaratne of the CID spoke about a coconut estate about 80 acres in extent situated in Vanathavilluwa in the Karadiyanpual Grama Niladhari Division. This estate had to be accessed through jungle land. The access road was not a straight road but a road with several bends. There was a house built out of cement blocks. The two persons whom the police were looking for were Abu Haneefa Mohamed Mufess and Abu Hansar Mohamed Hamas. They were wanted in connection with the destruction of the statues of Lord Buddha.

According to Mufee's statement recorded on 16.01.2019, the house with the cement blocks had been constructed about five months prior to 16.01.2019, i.e., in or about August–September 2018. The police had also found another house that had been constructed in or about August–September 2018. These houses were obviously not there when Pillayan allegedly requested that a meeting be arranged at the said coconut estate in February 2018. Azad Maulana was obviously not speaking the truth in regard to the alleged meeting on the coconut estate.

The report further states:

"We are disturbed that despite reports and information being readily available regarding the impending April 2019 Easter Sunday bomb attack, no action was taken to prevent the occurrence of that tragedy."

Hansir Azad Maulana, who claims to be a witness on Channel 4, has revealed that he had close contact with Supriyaan Mohammed Shafraz, the doctor who treated Zahran's brother Rilwan when he was injured in a bicycle bomb test five days before the Easter attacks. Reportedly, Dr. Shafraz, who

admitted Rilwan to the hospital, fled Sri Lanka immediately after the Easter attacks and sought asylum in a foreign country. The main reason for his escape was the CID's investigation into Rilwan's hospital admission and his arrest.

It has also been stated that both this doctor and the Channel 4 whistleblower Hanzeer Azad Maulana are neighbors in Ebenezer Place, Dehiwala, and are also neighbors in Azad's village, Kattankudy.

After this medical doctor fled the country, he initially worked for a United Nations-affiliated organization in a South Asian country, and Azad Maulana attempted to get a job with that organization through him.

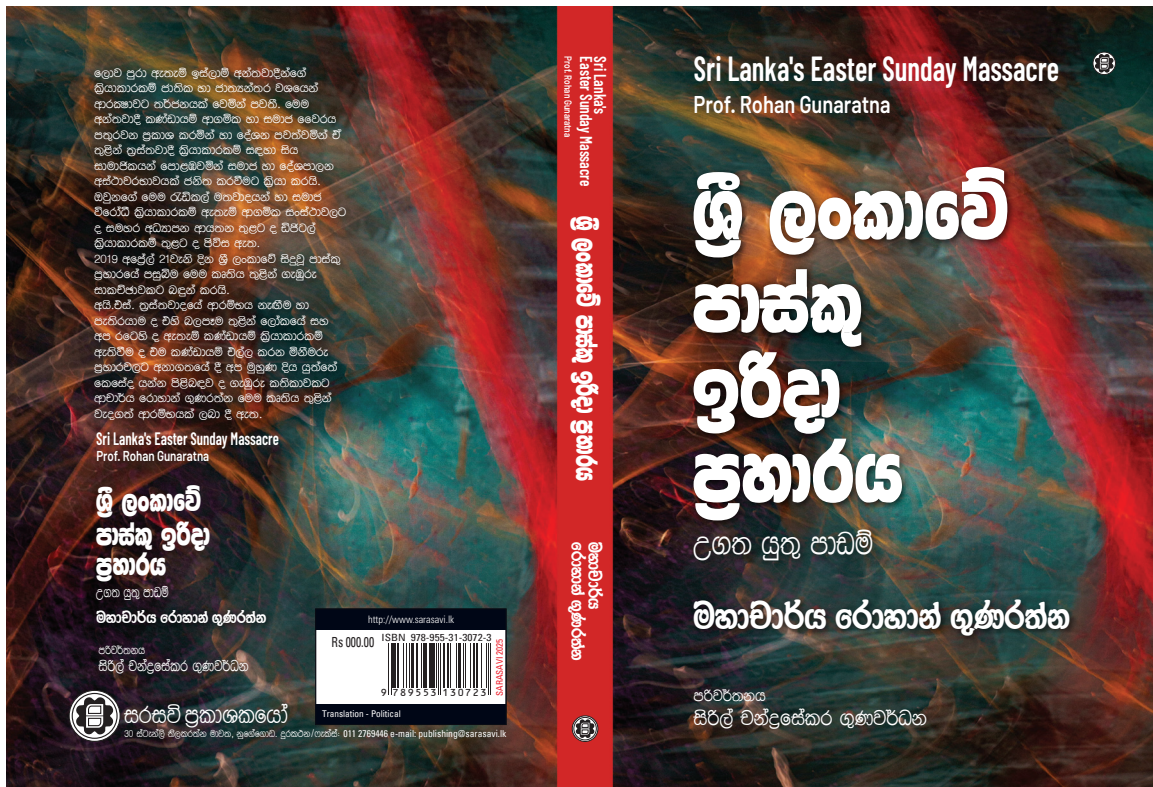
Although the doctor offered him a job in Mali, Maulana declined, stating he preferred to go to a European country. Subsequently, Maulana took steps to obtain political asylum in Europe through another method. This is mentioned in police reports, and the recently released S.I. Imam report has also provided details about this.

Accordingly, the committee has recommended that charges be filed against Azath Maulana for his links with terrorists including Rilwan and his close contacts with those who aided the terrorists.

Furthermore, the Criminal Investigation Department is currently conducting new investigations regarding the Channel 4 program, including these matters, and Suresh Saleh retired from his position as Director General of the State Intelligence Service before these investigations began.

Need for an International Investigation

"Questions about involving international



“Sri Lanka’s Easter Sunday Massacre - Lessons to be Learnt” published by Sarasavi, Sri Lanka

investigators in the investigation of the Easter attacks have been raised. International investigative assistance has been obtained for the Easter attacks investigation. These agencies include Interpol, the AFP (Australia), the FBI (US), and Scotland Yard (UK).

The FBI investigated the Easter Sunday attacks for nearly two years and submitted its final report to the Criminal Investigation Department in Sri Lanka. As five American citizens were dead, the US Department of Justice filed a criminal complaint in the Los Angeles District Court based on the FBI's investigation.

FBI investigations identified three Sri Lankans involved in the Easter Sunday attacks and charged Mohammed Naufer, alias Naufer Maulavi, who was responsible for spreading Islamic State ideology in Sri Lanka. Charges have been filed in local courts against him for recruiting others to IS and leading the training necessary to carry out the Easter Sunday attacks.

The U.S. Department of Justice stated in its official statement:

"The three defendants named in the criminal complaint, all of whom pledged allegiance to ISIS, are:

- Mohammed Naufar, the "second emir" for the group of ISIS supporters that called itself "ISIS in Sri Lanka," who allegedly led the group's propaganda efforts, recruited others to join ISIS, and led a series of multi-day military-type trainings;
- Mohamed Anwar Mohamed Riskan, who allegedly helped manufacture the IEDs used in the Easter attacks; and
- Ahamed Milhan Hayathu Mohamed, who allegedly executed a police officer in order to obtain the officer's firearm, shot a suspected informant and scouted a location for a separate terrorist attack.

Furthermore, the then Sri Lankan Ambassador to the United States, Mahinda Samarasinghe,

submitted an inquiry into the investigation of the Easter Sunday attacks and its progress, as well as a request for another independent investigation, to the US State Department. The US State Department responded:

"Ambassador Samarasinghe, We stand ready to continue providing support to your government. It would not make sense for the United States to conduct an additional investigation into the attacks."

The Australian Federal Police conducted investigations into the Easter Sunday attacks, during which more than 700 electronic devices were subjected to forensic examination, and another 33 electronic devices were taken to Australia for forensic examination.

In a letter dated March 29, 2022, the then IGP asked the Australian Federal Police whether there were any findings relevant to the investigations. The Australian Federal Police replied on April 21, 2022:

"I can advise that the AFP has completed all investigations in conjunction with the Sri Lanka Police and provided reports and conclusions to these authorities."

AFP officers and three officers who assisted in the investigation have been included as witnesses in the Colombo Three-Judge High Court Case No. TAB 2972/21 relating to the Easter attacks.

The way forward

It is six years after the Easter Sunday attacks. The pursuit of truth and justice remains a pressing concern for victims and society. While the suicide perpetrators of the attacks are no longer alive, numerous individuals and networks that supported them—through financial, material, and ideological means—

have been identified, arrested, and are facing prosecution both in Sri Lanka and internationally.

Despite this progress, questions of accountability persist, particularly regarding the systemic failures and institutional negligence that enabled the attacks. Accusations have been leveled against members of the intelligence community, law enforcement, political leadership, and bureaucratic institutions—yet several have evaded scrutiny and justice. In addition to starting a program to rehabilitate the violent and radical extremists in custody, the clerics and preachers who promote suspicion, prejudice, resentment, anger, and hatred should be investigated, arrested, prosecuted, and rehabilitated. The radical politicians and others who promote false narratives and conspiracy theories should be punished.

In this unresolved landscape, conspiracy theories have proliferated, distorting public discourse and hindering the collective pursuit of accountability. For some, the tragedy has become a socio-political tool or a vehicle for personal agendas, further complicating efforts to arrive at the truth.

The critical question now remains: who is genuinely committed to uncovering the truth and delivering justice, and who seeks to obscure or delay this process? The answer will shape the nation's path toward genuine reconciliation and lasting accountability. To restore social harmony, political stability, and economic prosperity, Sri Lanka and Sri Lankans should seek transparency and hold their politicians and officials accountable.

Rohan Gunaratna is the author of the recently published "Sri Lanka's Easter Sunday Attacks in Sri Lanka - Lessons to be Learnt," by Sarasavi in April 2025.



BY:

கணியன் பூங்குன்றன்
Kaniyan Pungundran

"Being deeply loved by someone gives you strength while loving someone deeply gives you courage," wrote Lao Tzu. While not everyone may fully subscribe to the sentiments of this timeless thinker, one young doctor from Sri Lanka—Dr. Thisara Kavinda, a recent graduate of the Jaffna Medical Faculty, and his wife most certainly do.

"I would have probably ended up a daily-wage labourer had I not met her—my then-girlfriend,

*I Love,
Therefore
I Am*

now my wife—Bhagya Senarathne,” he said in an emotion-laden interview with Jaffna Monitor. Standing proudly by his side is Bhagya Senarathne herself, an accomplished lawyer and alumna of the Faculty of Law, University of Colombo.

"Forget about becoming a lawyer," Bhagya confessed, her voice trembling with emotion. "I might not have even passed my A/L exams if I hadn't met him. Everything I am today—I owe to him." Before the weight of her words could settle in the air, Dr. Kavinda gently cut in, his eyes filled with quiet reverence. "I owe my entire life to her."

As the great poet Pablo Neruda once wrote, Kavinda continued, "I want to do with you what spring does with the cherry trees." Then, with a glance full of memory and meaning, he added, "She did exactly that to me, iya."

"She walked into the life of an orphan—one hardened by toil, bent by grief, and forgotten by the world—and made it bloom. She brought colour to my grey skies, breath to my weary soul, and turned the withering branches of my youth into blossoms of hope."

And in that shared breath—the silent symphony of two souls suspended between heartbeats, in that tender exchange that needed no further articulation—lay a truth more profound than any poetry ever penned.

Born of Hardship, Raised in Hope
Kavinda was not born into privilege. He came from the small village of Thambuththegama in Sri Lanka's Anuradhapura District—incidentally, also the hometown of the country's current President, Anura Kumara Dissanayake. Born into extreme poverty, Kavinda's life took a difficult turn before it even began: his father abandoned the family when he was less than a year old.



Thisara Kavinda and Bhagya Senarathne

In a desperate bid to secure her son's future, his mother left for Lebanon to work as a domestic aide, leaving young Thisara in the care of his grandmother, Dingiri Manike. Though she had only studied up to the fourth grade, Dingiri Manike was a woman of remarkable wisdom and resilience. She became his unwavering pillar of strength.

They lived in a small mud hut, without electricity, and endured relentless hardship. Together, grandmother and grandson toiled in the paddy fields to survive.

His mother eventually returned from abroad, and for a brief moment, young Thisara's world lit up with hope. "I was overjoyed when she came back," he recalled. But that happiness was tragically short-lived. Just months after her return, she was diagnosed with blood cancer—

and passed away while Thisara was preparing for his Ordinary Level (O/L) examinations.

"My life shattered completely," he said. "We went bankrupt after my mother's death. Society turned its back on us. I had no one left but my grandmother—and she was already quite old."

Left with no other option, Thisara began working as a child labourer to help sustain his household.

"I did whatever work I could find—assisting masons, doing cleaning jobs, working in the fields—anything and everything," he said, reflecting on those grueling years of survival.

Yet, despite the crushing hardships, his commitment to education never wavered. He attended Bellankadawala Maha Vidyalaya, a humble village school, where he excelled academically—earning six A's in his O/L examinations. It was a life-changing achievement that secured him admission to Anuradhapura Central College for his Advanced Level studies.

Love at First Sight

"I was in the Bio stream at Anuradhapura Central College," Thisara Kavinda recalled. "One day, I casually dropped by the classroom of a friend who was in the Maths stream. That's when I first saw her—Bhagya, his classmate. It felt like just another moment back then, but looking back, it was the moment everything changed."

"I instantly fell in love with that innocent-looking girl," Kavinda confessed, his voice softened by the passage of time and the depth of his feelings. "What I didn't realize then," he continued, his gaze drifting as if lost in the

echoes of the past, "was that she would become the turning point in my life—the one who would fill the aching void left by my mother's death."

She reciprocated his love a few months later. That moment, as Kavinda recalled, felt like a rebirth. "I had no one, and then, suddenly, it felt as though all the angels' blessings had descended upon me."

Bhagya, the daughter of a former Director of Sinhala Language at the North Central Provincial Education Department, hailed from a modest but stable middle-class background. Despite their vastly different upbringings, she saw in Thisara something exceptional—authenticity, humility, and a quiet but unwavering determination.

"This schoolgirl," he began, "added colour to my dark life—like a vibrant bloom against a stark canvas." He paused a flicker of the past in his eyes. "Back then," he continued, "I had nothing in this world to truly call my own. My heart felt like an empty room, echoing with silence." A poignant truth hung in the air. Then, a warmth entered his tone—a light breaking through the shadows. "Yet, she fell in love with me," he said, "Me—a boy with no parents, no wealth to offer, no money to his name, and no guaranteed future. Just a student, and a menial worker, grappling with his A/Levels. While her friends, perhaps understandably, looked for boys with the markers of a secure future—vehicles, status—she laughed and walked with me, hand in hand, deeply in love."

"When I met him," Bhagya began, "I saw the most innocent boy—someone who was in desperate need of genuine love. There was a purity about him, a vulnerability that touched my soul."



She paused, a soft smile likely gracing her lips as she recalled those early days. "He was doing pottery, taking on rental work. He walked to school just to save the bus fare. He was fighting for survival in every way possible." Her voice then took on a deeper resonance. "And in that boy," she continued, I saw not just a lover, not someone to share fleeting moments with—I saw my best friend. I saw the one person with whom I could navigate life's entire journey, hand in hand, through its sunshine and its storms."

The Promise

The shadow of the Advanced Level examinations loomed large. When the results finally arrived, Thisara Kavinda had done well—not quite achieving his ultimate dream of entering medical school, but securing two Bs and a C, more than enough to gain admission into a bioscience or any other reputable degree program at a Sri Lankan university.

But then came a decision that surprised many—he didn't even apply.

His explanation, when it came, was disarmingly simple. "Bhagya had failed in the Maths stream," he told Jaffna Monitor. "I couldn't bring myself to leave her behind. The thought of stepping forward into a new chapter without her felt like tearing myself in two."

Bhagya, reflecting on that time, echoed his sentiment with quiet emotion "He refused to move forward without me," she affirmed. "We made a promise—to study hard and enter university together." Bhagya switched to the Arts stream, while Thisara continued in Biology.

Every morning, the two made their way to the Anuradhapura Public Library, where they studied side by side—until the doors closed each evening. "She brought food for me every day," Thisara recalled warmly.

"I'm naturally a lazy person," Bhagya laughed, "but he motivated me in every possible way."

Although the library had separate seating areas for boys and girls, they always chose spots where they could see each other. "If I felt sleepy or lost focus, he'd signal to me from across the room," she said, smiling at the memory. Their shared dream, Bhagya revealed to Jaffna Monitor, was to enter the University of Peradeniya—home to both the Medical and Law faculties. "We hoped to go there so we could stay close while pursuing our respective ambitions," she said.

To keep himself afloat, Thisara found refuge and kindness in the home of a friend's family in Anuradhapura town. There, within unfamiliar walls, he channeled the same fierce

determination he had once poured into back-breaking labour into the demanding world of A/L studies.

He took her along that journey. Together, they were laying a new foundation—brick by painstaking brick.

Then came the moment they had both worked so tirelessly for—the culmination of months of sacrifice and unwavering dedication.

Bhagya, fueled by a spirit that refused to be defined by a single setback, rose to the challenge with breathtaking strength. In just six months, she transformed disappointment into triumph, securing three A's—a feat that earned her a coveted place at the Colombo Law College.

And Thisara—the boy once dismissed, whose worth had been measured in the sweat of his brow, the boy who walked miles to save a few rupees—had shattered every expectation. He secured admission to the prestigious Jaffna Medical Faculty.

Though their dream of studying together at Peradeniya was not realised, they had achieved something far more meaningful—they had risen, together.

A New Beginning

Their love only grew stronger—despite the physical distance between Colombo and Jaffna, separated by more than 300 kilometers and long, tiresome hours of travel. "There were times we could meet only once or twice a year," Bhagya recalled. "But love doesn't always require physical presence. Sometimes, it just needs spiritual presence."

Their bond echoed the tender words of American poet E.E. Cummings, who once

wrote: "I carry your heart with me (I carry it in my heart)...

I am never without it (anywhere I go you go, my dear)." For Thisara and Bhagya, this wasn't just poetry—it was the absolute truth. Even when miles apart, they carried each other's presence within them, quietly and constantly—proof that love, when true, transcends both time and distance.

Now, recently married and newly graduated, they have found a way to stay close despite the demands of their professions. Thisara is currently serving his internship at the Panadura Hospital, while Bhagya is practicing law in Colombo.

"Finally, destiny brought us to a place where we can be together," Bhagya said, smiling as she looked at her husband by her side—a moment that felt like the quiet fulfilment of a long-promised dream. "She made me blossom into who I am today," he said, his eyes reflecting a quiet indebtedness—to the universe, and to the little girl who once believed in a boy with nothing but dreams.

Their love story whispered through the ages, finds its echo in the ancient Tamil verses of Kurunthokai. Like the poet Sembula Peyaneerar sang in Kurunthokai 40:

”யாயும் ஞாயும் யார் ஆகியரோ?
எந்தையும் நுந்தையும் எம் முறைக் கேளிர்?
யானும் நீயும் எவ் வழி அறிதும்?
செம் புலப் பெயல் நீர் போல
அன்புடை நெஞ்சம் தாம் கலந்தனவே.”

(Loosely translated as: “Our mothers are strangers. So are our fathers. You and I—we were once unknown to each other. Yet here we are—our hearts mingled, as inseparably as rainwater sinking into red earth.”)



Thisara and Bhagya's love was just that—unwritten by lineage, untouched by status, and unknown to fate. It was a bond that defied every boundary. Like rain finding its way home to the parched earth, their hearts found in each other something timeless, something whole.

As the greatest poet of Tamil, Bharathi, once declared:

“ஆதலினாற் காதல் செய்வீர், உலகத்தீரே!
அ.தன்றோ இவ்வுலகத் தலைமையின்பம்.”

(“Therefore, love—O people of the world! For is that not the greatest joy in life?”)

Indeed, what is life, if not illuminated by the radiant flame of love?

From ‘Change’ to Family Chain? NPP’s Jaffna MP Sparks Nepotism Row



Jaffna NPP MP Rajeevan Jeyachandramoorthy’s wife and nephew receiving JP certificates

Questions are mounting over alleged nepotism involving Rajeevan Jeyachandramoorthy, the National People’s Power (NPP) Member of Parliament for the Jaffna District, just months after his election on the party’s much-publicized platform of systemic change.

Rajeevan, a former loyalist of the Illankai Tamil Arasu Katchi (ITAK) and once a close associate of M.A. Sumanthiran, joined the NPP shortly before the 2024 general elections. He secured a parliamentary seat riding the wave of popular support generated by the NPP’s promise of a corruption-free country and the charisma of its leader, Anura Kumara

Dissanayake—what many have dubbed the “Anura Wave.”

However, since assuming office, Rajeevan has come under fire from his own constituents, rival parties, and civil society groups for allegedly prioritizing his own family members in public appointments—drawing a sharp contrast to the NPP’s pledge to dismantle entrenched political patronage networks.

According to credible reports: His father is contesting the upcoming Vellani Pradeshiya Sabha election as an NPP candidate. His mother, wife, and son-in-law have all been appointed Justices of the Peace (JPs) after he

became an MP. His nephew has also been appointed a JP, despite questions over whether he meets the minimum age requirement of 30—raising concerns about eligibility and procedural integrity.

Locals who voted for the NPP hoping to break away from entrenched political culture are now voicing their disappointment. “This isn’t the change we were promised. We voted to clean up the system, not to watch a new family tree grow inside it,” said a Jaffna-based teacher who voted for the NPP in both the last presidential and parliamentary elections, speaking to Jaffna Monitor.

Political observers warn that Rajeevan’s rapid elevation of family members could seriously undermine the credibility of the NPP in the North, where the party made historic inroads by appealing to younger voters and those disillusioned with traditional Tamil parties. Despite the growing controversy, the NPP leadership has yet to issue a public response.

Meanwhile, political analysts and civil society activists are urging Anura Kumara Dissanayake to take a clear stand. “This was supposed to be a moment for a new kind of politics,” said one activist. “Instead, we’re seeing the same old patterns—just dressed up in the name of change.”

In an attempt to assert that his wife would not enter politics, Rajeevan took to Facebook and declared: “எனது மனைவி மயூரிக்கா ஒரு போதும் அரசியலுக்கு வரமாட்டார். யார் அழைத்தாலும் நான் விடமாட்டேன்.” (“My wife Mayurika will never enter politics. No matter who calls her, I will not allow it.”) But instead of putting an end to the controversy, his post sparked a fresh wave of criticism.

Social media users slammed the MP, asking, “Who are you to stop her? Are you practicing blatant male dominance in the name of politics?”



A campaign poster of Rajeevan’s father, Jeyachandramoorthy, contesting in the upcoming local body election

Even Tamil poet Karunakaran weighed in with a public comment, saying:

“You shouldn’t say things like ‘No matter who calls her, I won’t allow it.’ Women’s participation in politics is important. More importantly, everyone has the right to it. As a husband, you cannot deny her that right. Making joint decisions is one thing; blocking her entirely is another. Saying publicly that you won’t permit her to enter politics will subject you to severe criticism. Be mindful...”

With criticism mounting from all sides, Rajeevan quietly edited his Facebook post to read: “எனது மனைவி மயூரிக்கா ஒரு போதும் அரசியலுக்கு வரமாட்டார். யார் அழைத்தாலும் அவர் விரும்ப மாட்டார்.” (“My wife Mayurika will never enter politics. No matter who calls her, she will not be interested.”)

The shift in tone—from “I won’t allow it” to “she won’t be interested”—didn’t go unnoticed. He was doing what some have called the usual modus operandi of Jaffna Tamil politicians: quietly tweaking the words as if nothing had ever happened.

Whose culture is it anyway?:-

Co-evolution of musical traditions in Sri Lanka



BY:

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No culture can live if it attempts to be exclusive. Mahatma Gandhi

Background: The post-independence history of many countries that faced colonial rule has many commonalities. In the Indian sub-continent, having faced the dehumanising consequences of colonial rule together, the 'Brown-sahibs' - of all sides, created divisive narratives that enabled them to consolidate their positions within the power hierarchies of their communities. 'WE had a unique and pure culture which was polluted, diluted or bastardised by THEM' was the message given to the electorates, and this 'US Vs THEM' narrative pervaded all aspects of political discourse, periodically spilling over as large scale violence. Even though the minority communities bore the brunt of these violent outbursts, all segments of society suffered its multi-faceted consequences. It was easy to create a culture of nepotism, corruption, and economic mismanagement as all criticisms against this trend could be deflected and the blame shifted to 'THEM'. This divisive narrative included falsification of history creating an illusion of multiple 'pure cultures' that were contaminated and degraded by the arrival of the others. All aspects of social life – religion, language, food habits, art, music and dance included, were seen through the prism of 'US Vs THEM'. For example, the identical mixture of



The identical mixture of boiled Mung beans, brown sugar and a variety of spices when fried in the shape of flat squares, triangles or rhomboids came to be known as ‘Mung Kavung’ and when fried in the shape of spherical balls came to be known as ‘Payaththam Paniyaram’ with strong cultural connotations amongst the Sinhala and Tamil groups respectively. (Adapted from Google Images with Thanks)

mung beans, brown sugar and spices when fried in oil in the shape of spherical balls came to represent the Tamil culture (‘Payaththam paniyaram’ or பயத்தம் பணியாரம்) but when shaped into a flat squares, triangles or rhomboids (Mung Kavung or මුං කැවුන්) came to represent a strong Sinhala culture and the differences were deemed irreconcilable. To any neutral outsider, the conflict between the groups was no different to the wars between the “little endians” and “big endians” in Jonathan Swift’s Gulliver’s Travels! The fallacy of this approach needs to be confronted if we are to truly appreciate the multi-dimensional, inclusive and inter-dependent manner in which history and cultures evolved. The musical history of Sri Lanka provides a window of opportunity to do so, for the music of the land – practiced in all nooks and corners of the country, is truly a product of inter dependence and co-evolution. Traces of every form of music can be seen in every other form of music, if only we take the time and effort to look for these commonalities.

Jim Sykes, a musicologist from the University of Pennsylvania refers to the aesthetic system that emerged across the island, among all its people as a system of ‘Musical Gift’ (The

Musical Gift: Sonic Generosity in Post-War Sri Lanka, Oxford University Press 2018). In this way of thinking, “some sounds are meant to be given, in that they can be shipped and tracked as they move, given or bought and re-gifted by one person to another, and enjoyed through this transition but not construed as inherently expressive of the soul of the person or community or geographical location that offers it”. In other words, what Sykes implies is an open and seamless system where sounds and expressions have moved freely across all boundaries, accepted, adapted and adopted by individual practitioners. Given this general background, the rich tapestry that resulted in the island can only be described as something that co-evolved amongst all the island’s inhabitants. The Musical gifts came from far and wide – North and South India, Africa, Europe and the Far East, and these gifts were accepted and indigenised.

The music of the Vedda: The Vedda (වෙඩ්දා or වන්නියලැත්තෝ) community is considered to be the indigenous people of the island nation. Their history predates 6th century BCE and are the hunter-gatherers who lived in the forests and caves. Genetic studies have found that the Vedda are genetically closer to some Indian tribes than to Sinhala or Sri Lankan

Tamils and as such they could be considered to be part of an ancient group(s) of people who lived in the subcontinent and surrounding islands. The Vedda communities, displaced from around the entire country, currently live in small villages scattered around the Eastern and North-Eastern slopes of the central hills and in the North Central province. Dambana, Rathugala, Pollebedda, Dalukana, Henanigala, Vakara, Muttur, Anuradhapura and Panama are some of the areas where the Vedda communities currently live in relatively small numbers. The early musical practices in the Vedda community is hard to determine, even though it is safe to speculate that simple wind instruments, percussion instruments and string instruments may have been in use. Ramayana refers to the use of Yarl (or the harp) and the Veena in ancient Lanka in the royal courts and, there is no reason to believe that similar instruments may not have been used by the ordinary citizenry too.

Drumming certainly has been practiced extensively within the Vedda communities for purposes of communication, entertainment and in religious ceremonies. The shapes of these drums amongst the different Vedda subgroups sheds an interesting insight into the importance of external influences in shaping these drums. Whereas the communities that lived in close proximity to the Tamil populations in the East – such as Vakara, use drums that are similar in shape to the ‘Tamilised’ drum – the ‘Mattalam’ (மத்தளம்), others who lived in close proximity to established Sinhala communities in the more central regions tend to use drums that resemble the ‘Davula’ (දවුල) or the ‘Gata Beraya’ (ගැට බෙරය) – commonly used by Sinhala musicians (Sykes 2018). This illustrates, how the musical practices of a neutral community such as the Vedda, who were uninfluenced by the political rhetoric of the urban middle classes, was shaped by the surrounding environment through the

seamless flow of musical traditions between people who live in close proximity. Saying that the Vedda music has been shaped and influenced by the musical practices of other communities does not deny the existence of musical traditions within the Vedda community or undervalue the quality of those native musical traditions. But rather, it means that these traditions and practices have been in a state of continuous flux through sonic donations and Musical giving.

The Parai and the Bera: Parai (பறை), is the traditional drums of the Tamil people living in South India and in Sri Lanka. Until the arrival of the Thavil to Sri Lanka in the latter half of the 18th century, the Parai music was at the heart of communal events – socio cultural as well as religious. The communities that played the Parai once held a more respected status within the Tamil society which was progressively eroded by the pernicious effects of the caste system inherent within Hinduism. As a result, the status of Parai, and other stigmatised drums such as ‘Urumi’ (உருமி) was significantly downgraded along with that of the community who performed the drumming. This down grading was more pronounced in the Northern Province than in either the Eastern Province or amongst the Tamils living in the Hill country – referred to as the ‘Malaiyaga Thamilar’ (மலையக தமிழர்). Despite such distortions, Parai music was in widespread use in Hindu temples all over Sri Lanka – including those dedicated to Shiva. Its current use in temples is however limited to the non-Agamic temples dedicated to Shakti, Amman or the mother goddess. In the Eastern province however the Parai music forms an integral part of a form of street drama, commonly known as ‘Parai Mela Koothu’ (or பறை மேள கூத்து) – a tradition of dancing with the Parai and a short double reed wind instrument called the Sornali. The versions of drums used in this context would include the traditional Parai, Udukkai (or உடுக்கை),



A



B

Representative scenes from a standard Tamil Koothu. A: Stage play and B: Background singers with a variety back-up instruments including the drum and cymbals. Adapted from Wikimedia Commons under the Creative Commons License.

Urumi (a drum similar but slightly longer than the Udukkai), maththalam (மத்தளம்) and Tappattam (or தப்பட்டம்). Koothu, incidentally is a form of story-telling using music and dance as the medium of expression. This genre of street performances is known as ‘Theru Koothu’ (தெருகூத்து) whose origins can be traced to the Sangam period (300BCE-300AD). Many such Koothus, usually named after the lead character in the story – Kaman Koothu, (காமன்கூத்து), Kathavarayan Koothu (காத்தவராயன் கூத்து) etc., are integral to the Tamil culture in Sri Lanka, whose influences have been far reaching, extending beyond the Tamil community.

Similar percussion instruments – known as the Bera, have also formed an important component of social life amongst the Sinhala speaking communities in Sri Lanka. Broadly speaking, three distinct forms of Bera traditions can be identified in Sri Lanka (though a musical purist may be able to name many more different traditions). These are the Low Country (or Pahata Rata, approximately between Horana to Matara), the Up Country (Uda Rata, or the central hill region surrounding Kandy) and the Sabaragamuwa – an intermediate zone around Ratnapura.

Whereas the Yak Bera (a straight drum with lower tone) is integral to the Low Country drumming, the Gata Bera (with tapered ends and a higher tone) is mostly integral to the Up Country drumming. Both the Yak Bera and the Gata Bera are played with the two hands. The drum that is indigenous to the Sabaragamuwa region is the ‘Davula’, which is played with one hand and a stick. Locally available wood (Jack, Kohomba and Ehela etc.) and animal hide (buffalo, cow, goat, monkey or monitor lizard etc.) are used in drum-making. According to Sykes, “All three major Berava drums are performed in highly hallowed Buddhist contexts in their respective regions, such as chant ceremonies (pirit), peraheras and rituals for deities (deva tovils) held at shrines (devales)”. In this context, the term ‘Bera’ refers to the drum and the ‘Berava’ refers to the caste of the drummers. The Berava usually perform the role of ritual specialists, and sounding the drums is an integral part of these rituals. The rituals are usually aimed at seeking the blessings of deities (Deva tovils) or wading off evil spirits (Yak tovils) who can cause harm – including disease, pestilence, drought and famine. Traditionally, the Berava caste was assigned a subservient position within the social hierarchy, despite the



A



B



A



B

The different types of drums used traditionally in Sinhala Berava ensembles. A: Gata Beraya, mostly associated with the Kandyan region; B: Yak beraya, mostly associated with the low country; C: Davula Beraya, mostly associated with the Sabaragamuwa region and D: Thammattama. Source: Adapted from Google Images with thanks.

rejection of the caste system within Buddhism. The Up Country Berava are considered superior to their Low Country counterparts as the Kandyan rituals focus on gods, whereas the Low Country rituals focus on appeasing demons and evil spirits. In addition to drumming, the Berava people also function as astrologers and folk healers well versed in Ayurvedic and other traditional medicines. Despite the multitude of roles played by the Berava people, the main societal role assigned to them was to honour the king and other

divine sovereign powers through musical offerings.

According to Sykes, the Berava drumming prevailed within a wider context of musical giving. As a result of the close proximity between Buddhism practiced in Sri Lanka and the four deities ('Hatara varam deviyo' – Vishnu, Natha, Pattini and Kataragama) who held delegated authority (varams), the Berava music had multiple intersections with Hindu gods and rituals that were strengthened during

the times of the kings (with Hindu roots) who ruled the Kandyan and Kotte Kingdoms. The structural similarities between the Parai and the Davula; the use of other similar instruments such as the ‘Thammattama’ and ‘Tappattam’; the structural similarities between the Gata Bera and the Mrdangam drum played in carnatic ensembles; the common use of Udukkai and Mattalam within both communities and the subservient position assigned to the Berava and Parayar communities strongly imply that these musical and social traditions have co-evolved and form part of a common heritage. Arguing for a common heritage merely acknowledges the fact that the development of these traditions are multi-faceted and does not imply the absence of rituals or musical traditions that are indigenous to each group.

The Koothu and the Nadagam Traditions:

It is fair to say that the art of story-telling using music is common to the Sinhala and Tamil speaking communities. In fact, one may reasonably argue that the traditions that underpin Tamil ‘Koothu’ and Sinhala ‘Nadagams’ are two sides of the same coin and the observations made by Sykes in this context are reproduced below.

“Koothu embodies a geographically broad history of musical giving from Tamil Christians to Tamil Hindus, from Tamil speaking Christians to Sinhala speaking Christians and from Sinhala speaking Christians to Buddhists and secularists. The genre emerged from South Indian “street theatre” (terukoothu or தெருகூத்து) that was adopted by Jesuit priests for their Portuguese-derived Passion plays and by Tamil Hindus for performances of Hindu epics.....From there the genre travelled down the west coast to Mannar and Chilaw where the Sinhala speaking Christians turned it into a genre called Nadagam..... The Nadagam was then popularised as a secular genre by Phillippo

Singho, whose well-known play Ehelapola Nadagama was produced in 1824.....Dr Edmund Peiris (former Bishop of Chilaw) argued that the Sinhala Nadagam dates back at least to M S Gabriel Fernando’s staging of Raja Tun-kattuwa (රජ තුනිකටුව) in Chilaw in 1761, a Nadagam modelled on the Tamil Natakam (i.e Koothu) ‘Muvirasakkal natakam’ or மு-இராசாக்கள் நாடகம், about the birth of Christ. Nadagam’s popularity declined in the late 19th century in the wake of visiting Parsi theatre troupes from Bombay, who bequeathed a local genre called ‘Nurthi’ that would become an important site for a renewed Sinhala identity..... The music in Sinhala Nadagams was heavily Tamil in flavour, drawing on South Indian carnatic music and the Koothu, and it used the same drum as the Koothu, which the Tamils call maththalam (or மத்தளம்) and the Sinhalese call maddalaya or Demala Bera (Tamil drum)”.

Interests in Sinhala Nadagam resurfaced in the 1950s with the staging of ‘Maname’ in 1956 and ‘Sinhabahu in 1961 by Professor Ediriweera Sarathchandra. Whereas ‘Maname’ is based on the Buddhist Jataka story about the former life of the Buddha, ‘Sinhabahu’ is based on the legendary forefather of the Sinhala people. Sarathchandra was an artistic innovator who drew from global theatre including Indian and Japanese theatre and true to his academic integrity acknowledged that his Nadagams were rooted in the Tamil Koothu. He is reported to have travelled to areas in the country where Koothu was practiced and “to learn about Koothu for his plays” (Sykes 2018).

The word ‘Nadagam’ itself was derived from the Tamil word ‘Natakam’. As such, the Nadagams and Koothus that have given joy to countless people across all ethnic divides - through multiple generations, have very similar roots. Academics such as Professor Mounaguru (Eastern University) and veteran



A



B

Scenes from the famous Nadagams by Professor Ediriweera Sarathchandra. A: Scene from Maname and B: Scene from Sinhabahu. Images obtained from Google Images with thanks

film director Dr Dharmasiri Bandaranayake, have used this concept of common heritage to build understanding and reconciliation between communities during the period of conflict.

The Carnatic and Hindustani Traditions: Ariyapala in his thesis to the University of London (M B Ariyapala, Society in Mediaeval Ceylon 1956), provides a detail account of the state of society in the island nation in the

13th century as depicted in the Saddharma Ratnavaliya and other literature from the 13th century. Parakramabahu II, was the leading figure from this period, and Ariyapala has the following to say about his reign. “The Chulavamsa gives a glowing account of his life and activities. It refers to his crushing of the alien foe, after which he set himself to bring about prosperity of Lanka. He built a temple for the Tooth relic near the palace, and having deposited the relic there, held a great



A



B

A: Mr Dharmasiri Bandaranayake, a veteran film director and Professor C Mounaguru, are two pioneers who developed the theme of ‘common heritage’ in Sri Lankan theatre and used it as a bridge between the communities during the conflict - despite significant challenges to personal safety.

festival in its honour. He cleansed the ‘church’ of corrupt practices, expelled evil doers and brought erudite monks from India to restore order. The Chulavamsa, describing his work in this respect says: ‘All the corrupt groups of bhikkhuswere dismissed from the order, and thus purified the order of the perfectly enlightened one. Then the king sent many gifts to the Cola country and caused to be brought over to Tambapanni many respected Cola bhikkhus who had moral discipline and were versed in the three Pitakas”.

In discussing the religious environment at the time, Ariyapala is very clear that Buddhism was the dominant force amongst the royal households as well as laity and that erudite monks played a prominent role in society. He however also makes the following observation. “Buddhism was so much of a sophisticated philosophy...” and as a result “the common man, grasped various non-Buddhist beliefs and practices from Hinduism and Brahmanism” (M B Ariyapala, Society in Mediaeval Ceylon 1956) in dealing with their day to day mundane challenges. These accounts clearly illustrate an environment of harmony and co-existence where free exchange of ideas and practices were possible. In discussing music and dance in the 13th century Ceylon, Ariyapala states “there is not the slightest of doubt that Kalas appertaining to music – vocal (gita or ගීත or சாகித்ய இசை), instrumental (වාදන or வாத்திய இசை) and dancing was widely cultivated”. The Vina was played very frequently and other instruments mentioned include the several types of Bera (or பறை), Mattalam (or maddala or the Tamil drum), mrdangam, Udukai, Kulal (or flute), horanava and tambour (or the Tampura) etc. The Thupa-vamsa even mentions – amongst a list of many other musical instruments, the nāgasara (நாகசரம்), kombu (கொம்பு), kaitalam (கைத்தாளம்), ottu (ஊத்துகுழல்) as instruments that were in use at the time. It is clear that many

of the instruments listed above are now identified with traditional Tamil music and its widespread use in 13th century Ceylon is relevant. Given this integrated environment where the ‘Sri Lankan’ music flourished in the 13th century through the interactions between ‘Sinhala’ and ‘Tamil’ forms of music, it is surprising that attempts were made in post-independence Sri Lanka to identify Hindustani music as the basis of Traditional Classical Music of Sri Lanka. All existing evidence suggests that the connection with Hindustani music commenced only after the period 1930-1950, when a number of musicians from Sri Lanka visited the music academy Shanthinikethan founded by Rabindranath Tagore to be trained in Hindustani Music. The elevation of this genre of music, which arrived in the country only in the 20th century, as the traditional music of the Sinhala people must therefore be seen as an imperative that existed amongst some middle class pseudo-intellectuals to establish a “considerable ancestral and geographical distance between Sinhalese and Tamil cultural traditions” (Jim Sykes 2018).

Conclusion: The intention of this article is not to provide a complete overview of all musical traditions that form part of the cultural tapestry of Sri Lanka. The stark gaps in the narrative presented - including the omission of popular musical traditions such as the ‘Baila’ and cinema-music, is acknowledged. However for the purpose of presenting a narrative of co-evolution and joint heritage, it was necessary to stick to classical art forms and it is hoped that the case presented is adequate to initiate greater discussion and debate. Such a debate is essential if we are to appreciate the historic role music has played in Sri Lanka in binding communities together. Acknowledging this historic reality and creating such an inclusive narrative is a pre-requisite if the country is to move forwards and realise its true potential.



THE FENCE

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

Translated by:
Eluttukkiṇiyavan
(எழுத்துக்கினியவன்)

Darkness smothered the sky in clumps. It seemed as if the vanguard of the night was spreading its tentacles while murmuring a lullaby song under its breath.

“Chē! After all, I shouldn’t have been so late.”

The thorn of guilt pricked at her heart. She was sweating profusely. She stepped over the threshold at the main entrance into the front yard and glanced at the hut. Having acquiesced to

the beatific silence of the night, it lay there listlessly, like the life of a widow.

The passionate, youthful feelings that had lain dormant all this time broke through the sentiments of pity and snowballed into something greater.

‘At least for today, let this lamp be lit in the hut,’ her heart resolved.

As her footsteps drew closer, a voice stirred to life from within the hut.

“Is that you, Rāyilā?”

“Yes! Yes!”

“Why so late today?”

“What can I do? How can I always come home early? Do I have a husband who's gathered and bundled the firewood for me?”

Rāhilā snapped at him. The man who was curled up in the plain straw mat regretted asking.

He struggled to bury his hurt deep within his chest, only for it to erupt as a red-hot sigh.

Rāhilā took the edge of her saree to dab away the beads of sweat on her face. The nagging feeling that her response had been tainted with unnecessary cruelty played hide-and-seek within her.

With a sense of duty, she lit the lamp, and a dull light spread within the hut. In that light, Rāhilā's eyes searched for the curled-up figure. It was not an unfamiliar figure. It was the figure that occupied the place of ‘Rāhilā's husband’ for the past five years.

The wellspring was breached.

Compassion trickled forth!

‘The poor soul,’ her heart was anguished.

“Are you ok?”

The conversation they just had completely slipped from her mind. His heart became light as a feather; he was like a toddler scrambling into his mother's lap after being punished.

“Rāyilā! I think I have a fever today. My chest feels tight, too, and I feel weak. Make me a little porridge with some broken rice.”

It took a Herculean effort for him to finish uttering these words.

Immediately, he was stricken by the thought of being on the receiving end of her sharp tongue with a retort like, ‘The Lord and Master demands porridge now, does he?’

For the past six or seven months, snapping at him no matter what he said had become second nature to Rāhilā. But today was different. Without a word, she complied with his request and began making porridge.

The clay stove caught the spark from her matchstick and began belching smoke. Rāhilā puffed up her cheeks and blew into the stove, wiping the smoke from her eyes. Her efforts were rewarded when a flame abruptly leapt up and spread.

Rāhilā's husband thought her body shimmered like gold in the light of that little flame.

He was sitting up with his back against the hut wall, his solitary leg stretched before him.

The pain weighed heavily on his chest, making him pant.

The pillow that supported his neck and head brought him comfort, but gazing at the exquisite beauty of his wife from this new angle sprouted a thorn bush in his heart.



As the fire took hold in the stove, Rāhilā walked back into the living space of the hut. The flowery silk saree and the velvet blouse they had bought for her wedding lay abandoned in the storage box. She picked them up with newfound fondness and laid them out to air on the coir clothesline.

A soft light began to spread, heralding the rise of the crescent moon. In her heart, too, an unfamiliar dull light began to spread. Rāhilā returned to the clay stove and crouched before it. They did not exchange a single word, but these two hearts often communicated more in silence than in words.

Rāhilā rinsed the rice in the arikkimilā, the metal pot for cleaning rice, to remove gravel, then poured it into the pot on the stove, and began mixing it.

He could not take his eyes off Rāhilā.

One cannot just introduce Rāhilā merely as a woman. She possessed the allure of a mango that had ripened on the tree amidst a cluster of others. When she smiles, it is impossible to take one's eyes off the beautiful dimple that forms on her left cheek. He always thought she was the desert flower upon which God chose to imprint His unique stamp of beauty.

She was his cross-cousin, which meant she was an eligible match for him in a society that permitted such marriages. Beguiled by her beauty, he courted her persistently. When he finally won her hand, he felt the pride of having all the world's riches heaped at his feet.

He felt a few inches taller, his chest fuller. As a lumberjack, when he walked to and from the jungle carrying small woven baskets full of snacks—the hallmark of a new groom—he exuded a unique majesty, like an emperor surveying the domain of his heart.

It was like the captivating light show of a rainbow, or the exquisite beauty of a water droplet shimmering like a pearl on the edge of a blade of grass... yet he was a simple, uneducated man, lacking the poetic imagination or the eloquence to describe the incredible life he had been gifted.

One day, he returned from the jungle, hobbling on his right foot. He laughed it off, saying a branch had struck his knee while he was chopping down a tree. Perhaps he believed that Rāhilā's charming smile would be the soothing balm to heal his injury. But reality grabbed that belief by the horns and shook it mercilessly. The wound festered, dragging him to and from the Puḷiyantivu hospital for months, until his right leg was amputated, leaving him confined to the straw mat at home as a permanent patient. In the process, their meager possessions and the few pieces of gold that once glittered on her body all vanished.

Rāhilā built a hut on a plot of sandy, barren, government land and began her life, hoping to find fulfillment by being there for her husband and caring for him.

The satisfaction she once found in realizing the dreams of her youth vanished into thin air, like a dream itself. Her youthful yearning left her feeling exposed, with a bitter taste at the back of her tongue. She wore her status as a

wife like armor and joined the ranks of women who earned a living on their own by collecting and selling firewood.

This arduous life continued for a few years, withering the flower of her life, petal by petal. But today, the fangs of the problem have risen up like a giant apparition.

The porridge boiled on the stove. The events that transpired earlier that day also smoldered and spread their tentacles.

Rāhilā had gone to the water's edge to wash up. When she returned, carrying a bundle of firewood, the horizon was decorated in crimson to bid farewell to the sun.

Her first thought was, 'Today is the day to deliver firewood to the village headman Ali's house.' The thought of that house made her shiver involuntarily from embarrassment and shyness.

She threw the bundle of firewood by the kitchen and drew water from the well to quench her thirst. Just then that village headman's driver, Karim, appeared from the direction of the garage. Over the past eight months, it had become customary for him to await her arrival, and for her to await his. They both knew this, but neither expressed it in words.

The light that shone through the gap in the open garage door painted Rāhilā in a golden hue. She squinted and asked, "Have they gone somewhere?"

"Today is their nārisā at the mosque, offering free meals to the faithful. That is why the boss and his wife are out."

As his mouth answered mechanically, his eyes lingered on her blouse, taking in the sight of her youthful, buxom figure that the fabric struggled to contain.

The complete self-realization struck her like lightning. She regarded her own body with newfound fondness. For four years, her husband had not been able to worship this body—the body that resembled a freshly bloomed flower, made firmer and stronger by the hard daily labor...

Shyness and modesty; Fury followed instantly!

She felt that the way he was undressing her with his eyes was obscene. Yet at the same time, a certain titillation tantalizingly tickled her.

In that moment, their eyes exchanged the timeless emotions surging within them.

The ecstasy born of forgetfulness was shattered by the birth of a sudden realization.

The faint memory of her husband lying in the cottage.

“Tell the headman that I have brought the firewood. Please give me some money if you have,” she mumbled each word hesitantly.

“OK, come inside!” Karim closed the door further as he went back into the garage.

Rāhilā’s suppressed emotions, long resigned to regarding the corporeal pleasures of youth as a mere mirage, began to bubble up whenever she saw him. In the beginning, her husband’s kind face and his disability joined forces to steady her wavering resolve.

But as time went by...

Whenever she lay down with her husband, Karim’s handsome face and his constant smile began to weave through her imagination as cross threads.

Eventually, the fortress was completely

breached. The silent pleasure of offering her body to Karim in her imagination had begun to pervade her entire being.

She realized that Karim was inviting her in to take advantage of this rare opportunity for them to be together alone. She followed in the footsteps of his desire and entered the garage.

Inside, a beatific silence connected them. They were so close that they could feel each other’s breath. He looked at her as if overwhelmed by the urge to drink in her beauty with his eyes alone.

“Are you going to swallow me?” she teased him with a smile.

“Rāyilā! I know your situation. I tried to talk to you so many times. But today I finally got the opportunity. Tell me if you agree.”

Until now, it had been Karim’s gaze that gave her the impetus to want to escape the prison of her anguished life. Now the third person has become the second person, speaking to her directly. A desperate hope budded in her heart and slowly began to grow.

“If you promise in the name of Allah that you won’t forsake me, I will follow you.”

The words burst through her lips, surprising her.

“Rāyilā!” he exclaimed as he embraced her tightly fulfilling his long-held desire. She lost herself in his embrace, powerless to resist his hands that were moving downwards from her waist. Muffled voices from the street outside reminded them that the garage they were in was not isolated from human habitation.

“What if the headman returns abruptly?” she hesitated.

“I, too, forgot. It is indeed time for them

to return. Take the money for the firewood directly from him. We don't want to arouse any suspicion. But keep this!" He thrust a five-rupee note into her hands. She hesitated again."

"From now on, everything I earn is for you," he forced the rupee note into her palms. She relented and took it.

"Rāyilā! Don't forget. I'll wait for you by the banyan tree just as the early morning train blares its siren."

Until now, throughout this interaction, she had remained like a motionless statue. Now she hung her head to indicate agreement. Her legs started walking away.

Rāhilā took the porridge off the fire, poured it into a bowl and began cooling it down. The siren from the paper mill blared, filling the entire area with its shrillness. Rāhilā looked at her sleepy husband and said, "Here, it is almost ten o'clock. Get up and have some porridge before you sleep..."

He slurped the porridge while leaning against the thatched coconut-leaf fence – "Rāhilā you suffer because of me. But God will not make you suffer forever. One day you will see your dawn."

He washed his hands and curled up on his mat once again.

The oil lamp belched thick smoke. A cluster of dark clouds slowly consumed the moon, which had reached its zenith.

The mist covered everything, as if a white silk awning had been draped over the world.

Rāhilā could clearly hear the first notes of birdsong welcoming the auspicious dawn.

She went to the well to do her morning chores.

The image of Karim waiting for her by the banyan tree filled her mind, spreading like a wall-to-wall carpet.

She retrieved the flowery silk saree and velvet blouse from beneath her mat and put them on, admiring the completeness of her own beauty.

Finally, out of habit, she glanced through the gap in the door – her husband's hands, anemic from the disease that was consuming him, lay facing upwards in desperate appeal to God. Teardrops welled in his eyes and slithered down his cheeks like a necklace of pearls. His dry lips parted...

"My creator! Forgive the sins I committed knowingly or unknowingly and save me from damnation, Rahumān! Have mercy on my wife, relieve her from the trials and tribulations she suffers because of me. Grant a good life at least to her, Rahmān!"

Rāhilā felt unable to move, as if her feet had sunk roots into the ground.

She thought of her husband who, despite being reduced to the state of a worm squirming in the mud, still showered her with love and compassion...

A newfound courage and resolve enveloped her.

She secured the five-rupee note in a knot at the edge of her saree. If she went to the village headman Ali's house, she needed to return it to Karim.

An old pot climbed on to the new fire she made on the stove.