

# PONNAMBALAM ARUNACHALAM



1853 - 1924





PONNAMBALAM ARUNACHALAM, 1897

# PONNAMBALAM ARUNACHALAM

SCHOLAR AND STATESMAN

**A Brief Account  
Of His Life  
And Career**

150 Birth Anniversary publication

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## SIR PONNAMBALAM ARUNACHALAM TRUST

*This short biography of Sir Ponnambalam Arunachalam is published on the occasion of the 150 Birth Anniversary of his birth by the Sir Ponnambalam Arunachalam Trust.*

<p><b>Chairman</b> V. Kailasapillai (President, All Ceylon Hindu Congress)</p> <p><b>Vice Chairmen</b> S. P. Samy (President, Colombo North Hindu Paripalana Sangam)</p> <p>J. M. Swaminathan (Representative of the Family)</p> <p>Sega Nagendra (Representative of the Family)</p> <p><b>Secretary</b> Kandiah Neelakandan (General Secretary, All Ceylon Hindu Congress)</p> <p><b>Treasurer</b> V. Kandasamy (Treasurer, All Ceylon Hindu Congress)</p> <p><b>Member</b> N. Subramanian (Secretary, Colombo North Hindu Paripalana Sangam)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>FOREWORD</b></p> <p>Sir Ponnambalam Arunachalam Trust was created on 9<sup>th</sup> January 2004 to perpetuate the teachings of Sir Pon. Arunachalam and a ceremony to commemorate his 150<sup>th</sup> Birth Anniversary was held at Galle Face Hotel, Colombo on 28<sup>th</sup> September, 2004.</p> <p>This Trust which has been formed by All Ceylon Hindu Congress (a Federation of Hindu Religious Associations and Charitable Trusts), Colombo North Hindu Paripalana Sangam, and members of the family of the late Sir Ponnambalam Arunachalam, decided to reprint a booklet containing the short biography of Sir Pon. Arunachalam which was published on the occasion of the Centenary of his birth in 1953. It is believed that the original transcript of the biography was prepared by Mr. James T. Ratnam although his name had not been given in the publication.</p> <p>We are re-publishing the said short biography in all three languages, (namely Sinhala, Tamil and English) to commemorate the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his birth.</p> <p>Although this publication could not be made in 2004 as planned, we thought that this is a publication which should reach the younger</p>
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generation of all the communities and should be published even belatedly.

Sir Pon. Arunachalam has rendered yeoman service to all the communities of this country and the nation as well. Glowing tributes has been paid by his contemporaries and by other leaders of this country from time to time regarding the unique services which he had rendered to the country as a member of the Ceylon Civil Service, a member of the Legislative and Executive Council, as a father of the University Movement in Sri Lanka in relation to social service activities and as a leader of the Ceylon National Congress. Sir James Peiris said that Sir Ponnambalam Arunachalam "did more for the political reorganisation of the Island and for the social advancement of the people than almost anyone in the past or recent times."

We have also conducted Essay competitions to commemorate the 150<sup>th</sup> Birth Anniversary among the school children and awarded prizes.

We must place on record our appreciation with gratitude of the generous contribution of Rs. 500,000.00 made by Her Excellency Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, then President of Sri Lanka from the President's Fund to us to commemorate the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary and in particular to assist us in this publication.

**V. KAILASAPILLAI**  
CHAIRMAN

December 2005

# **PONNAMBALAM ARUNACHALAM**

SCHOLAR AND STATESMAN

1853 -1924

## **A BRIEF ACCOUNT OF HIS LIFE AND CAREER**

**PONNAMBALAM ARUNACHALAM**, was a great public servant and patriot who, more than any other man of his time, helped to lay the foundations of the freedom which Sri Lanka enjoys today. A leader who was respected and trusted by his contemporaries, his life continues to be an inspiration to all who cherish high ideals of public service. His scholarship and culture, which were derived both from East and West, set off a nature that was inherently noble and imbued with a high sense of mission.

Ponnambalam Arunachalam, who was born on September 14th, 1853, was the youngest of three remarkable brothers, each of whom entered the Legislative Council and played a leading part in the public life of the country. Coomaraswamy, courageous and independent, died in 1906 after a career of singular distinction, and if his name is not so well known today it is because of the great renown attaching to the achievements of Ramanathan and Arunachalam. They belonged to a well known and highly respected family of Manipay, Jaffna. Coomaraswamy Mudaliyar, Arunachalam's maternal grandfather, was the Tamil Member of the first Ceylon Legislative Council established in 1834. Their mother's brother was Sir Muttu Coomaraswamy, well known in the salons of Paris and London in the sixties as the friend of Lord Houghton, Palmerston and Disraeli. Disraeli's unfinished novel

which was published after his death in the "Times" of London, referred to a character named Kusinara, an 'inhabitant of Ceylon,' presumably based upon his acquaintance with Muttu Coomaraswamy. He was a Barrister-at-Law of Lincolns' Inn and was for many years a leading member of the Legislative Council. He was the first Ceylon Tamil to be knighted and the first non-Christian Asiatic to be called to the Bar in England. Lord Houghton, one of his friends, wrote of him in a letter to Arunachalam: "I held him in great esteem and he has never received due credit for the energy with which he opened the Bar of England to all Eastern subjects of the Empress of India." According to Lord Houghton, Sir Muttu Coomaraswamy was greatly assisted by Lord Brougham in this matter. Ferguson of the "Observer" referred to him when he died as "the foremost man of the twenty millions or more of the Dravidian race." His only son died in 1947 in Boston, U.S.A. He was Ananda Coomaraswamy, the world-famous *savant* and art critic, whose exhaustive studies of Oriental art and thought played an important role in the cultural revival of India, and Ceylon, and helped to stimulate the growing interest in these matters in the West.

It was under the kindly protection and guidance of such a man as Sir Muttu Coomaraswamy that the three Ponnambalams grew to maturity. Arunachalam like his brothers attended the Royal Academy, the present Royal College. He won the Queen's scholarship, and Doctor Barcroft Boake, the Principal, writing of him said: "In my forty years' experience in the instruction of youth I have never met with any pupil who gave greater evidence of ability and scarcely one who gave so great. Mr. Arunachalam's conduct has always been most satisfactory and I consider him to be in every way a young man of the highest promise." This was high praise, coming as it did from a veteran schoolmaster who had taught some of the brightest young men of the day, such as C. A. Lorenz, the Nells, William Goonetilleke, Muttu Coomaraswamy and Dornhorst. Winning the English University

Scholarship in 1870, Arunachalam went to Christ's College, Cambridge, at the suggestion of Sir Walter Sendall, Director of Public Instruction, who wrote to the authorities there that he was sending to their care "an Eastern youth of exceptional merit and promise."

Within a short time of his admission, young Arunachalam made his mark by winning the foundation scholarship and distinguishing himself both in Classics and Mathematics. In the records of Christ's College he is referred to as "brilliant mathematician and an able Classics scholar." Among his tutors at Cambridge were Mr. (afterwards Lord Justice) Fletcher Moulton, Professor Reid, Doctor Peile and Rev. Skeat. In the circle in which he moved at Cambridge were the two Lyttletons, Gerald and Eustace Balfour, Professors Maitland and Foxwell, Rev. Cunningham, Lord Tennyson, the eldest son of the poet, Alexander Harris and Edward Carpenter. Carpenter cherished for Arunachalam a warm and life-long friendship, and paid a most eloquent tribute to his friend after his death by publishing a selection of Arunachalam's letters to him in a book entitled, "Light from the East."

Thrown into the company of such active and noble minds, Arunachalam spent his time to good purpose. A notable incident occurred during his College days in Cambridge. He took exception to certain remarks made by the Archbishop of York who, it appears, had preached to Cambridge undergraduates a sermon with "scant respect for Indian religions". On the day following this sermon, young Arunachalam scarcely out of his teens, joined issue with the venerable Archbishop and lodged a spirited protest. The correspondence was published in the "Spectator" in 1874. In 1875, much against his own inclination, he was persuaded by his uncle Sir Muttu Coomaraswamy to sit for the Civil Service examination. He had qualified for the Bar and had ambitions of a legal career but the gods willed otherwise. Arunachalam was the first Ceylonese to enter the Civil Service through the open door of competition.

On his return to Ceylon in April 1875, he was attached for a year to the Government Agent's office in Colombo, and for a few months to the Police Court at Kandy. He was later appointed to judicial office in various parts of the Island. He served as Police Magistrate and Commissioner of Requests at Kalpitiya, Puttalam, Matara, Avissawella, Pasyala, Matale, Kalutara and Colombo, and as District Judge of Chilaw, Kegalle, Kalutara, Batticaloa and Kurunegala. Even as an obscure Magistrate at Matara he showed his quality. His work attracted the favourable attention of Sir John Budd Phear, one of the greatest Chief Justices of Ceylon. In 1879, shortly before his retirement, Sir John specially commended his work to the notice of the Governor and the Secretary of State. He said that he knew of only two men in Ceylon who rose to the standard of what judicial officers ought to be; and they were Berwick and Arunachalam.

Arunachalam continued to hold judicial posts in various parts of the Island. When he was District Judge of Batticaloa, and still in the Fourth Class of the Civil Service, the Governor, Sir Arthur Gordon appointed him over the heads of about thirty seniors, among whom was Mr. (afterwards Sir) Alexander Ashmore, to act in the office of Registrar-General and Fiscal of the Western Province. A memorial was sent up to the Secretary of State signed by almost half the Civil Service protesting against the move, but Sir Arthur Gordon, who recognised merit where he found it, had his way.

In his new office Arunachalam showed remarkable administrative capacity. What he did for the reform of the Fiscal's office, then a sink of corruption and inefficiency, was well known to the lawyers and Judges of the time. On his recommendation the then lucrative office of Fiscal was separated from that of the Registrar-General, in order to enable the holder of this office to deal effectively with the re-organisation on his Department. The two branches of the Registrar-General's Department-Land



PORTRAIT OF ARUNACHALAM BY HIS FRIEND  
WILLIAM ROTHENSTEIN



SIR PONNAMBALAM ARUNACHALAM

Registration and the Registration of Births, Marriages and Deaths ramified over the whole Island and their re-organisation was an arduous task. Arunachalam carried it out to the satisfaction of Government. Sir Arthur Gordon, both officially and privately, thanked him for his services and expressed his great satisfaction at "a success which merited His Excellency's warm acknowledgments."

The Registrar - General's Department was rescued from a more deplorable condition. Some idea of the state of this Department before and after 1887 may be gathered by perusing the Administration Reports on Land Registration and Vital Statistics for the two periods. In the "Registration Department" declared the "Times of Ceylon" of the day, chaos and corruption held merry sway when Mr. Arunachalam came to it. The registration of deeds was subject to infinite delay and harassment. There was no index worth speaking of, and references to transactions and encumbrances affecting land were exceedingly difficult to ascertain. Fraud was rife and dishonest transactions often took precedence over genuine dealings and everybody's property and title were endangered. The records of the Department littered the floor of one particular room and most valuable documents, which cannot be replaced, lay where no man but an interested clerk could lay his hands upon them. There was plenty of "baksheesh" exacted and little honest work done, and yet the record room fees came to something like Rs. 25,000/-. Nobody could tell where the money went to. It was another Augean Stables, and no Hercules could hope to cleanse it. It was not lack of will but lack of knowledge. Mr. Arunachalam had a persevering mind. He sat by the side of the various clerks and patiently learned their work. Then he took charge and launched his reforms. He stopped the unconscionable delays and dishonesty in the registration of deeds, secured a fair day's work from each clerk throughout the Island and reduced the lazy, overgrown staff. He would have none of the private practice and private fees in



connection with official work. He re-organised the record room, appropriated the fees to the legitimate objects of the department, recast the whole system, increased and set apart a special staff to keep the records, inaugurated a real record room with a system and an index, built fine shelves, and with the surplus money derived from the fees he founded a Benevolent Fund which has now a funded capital of some Rs. 50,000/- and which has "saved many a clerk from the Chetty, disgrace and penury, relieved many a widow and orphan - it pays something like Rs. 1000/- upon the death of a member - and conducted more than any grandmotherly scheme of philanthropy to make the clerks of the department a thrifty, contented body of men. The same money has also helped to establish a reading room and a library, and generally to make the lives of the clerks lighter and brighter."

A distinguished American statistician, Frederick Hoffman, writing from Newark, U.S.A, to the Lieut. Governor of the Island acknowledging receipt of the report on the Ceylon Vital Statistics for 1898 said: "I will be permitted to express to you my great surprise at the exceptional care and thoroughness with which the Report of Vital Statistics has been prepared. Certainly in an experience extending over many years and including a knowledge of nearly all the British Colonies, I have never come in receipt of a similar report at once so comprehensive, scientific and useful... there is not published in the entire United States a report equally valuable and comprehensive."

The system of registration of deaths which Arunachalam put into force in the towns of Ceylon was then unique in the East. In 1895 he drew the attention of the country to the alarming death rate. Ascribing it to the insanitary conditions in the slums, he advocated the establishment of street lines, model tenements and a proper drainage system. As a direct result of these observations, the Governor secured the services of Mr. Mansergh from England to undertake drainage construction in Colombo. The information

that was so carefully collected, tabulated and compared by his Department, enabled the Government to know at a glance the true economic and social state of the country and adopt the necessary measures to reduce crime and disease.

Sir West Ridgeway, the Governor, entrusted to Arunachalam the organisation of the 1901 Census of Ceylon. It was planned on a more elaborate scale than before and was carried out in a manner that elicited the thanks of both the Governor and the Secretary of State. A summary of the main results of the Census was published within a week of the enumeration, the shortest interval at previous Censuses having been three months. He was the first Statistician to prepare a Life Table for Ceylon. The "Ceylon Observer" wrote of the Census Report: "Mr. Lionel Lee was considered to be the ablest Civil Servant of the time. Yet how bald and tame does his Census Report of 1891 read by the side of Mr. Arunachalam's of 1901! Extensive reading, unwearying industry, apt powers of condensation and critical discernment, leave their impress in happy combination upon its pages, forming altogether what is at once a most pleasing work and singularly valuable contribution." Arunachalam's Report was described by the "Times" of London as "the most comprehensive authority on the ethnology of Ceylon and of its varied people, their history, their religions, languages and literature." Armand de Souza, Editor of the "Ceylon Morning Leader", an influential publicist in his day, and always a great admirer of Arunachalam, said: "The curious reader will find the report which introduces the Census of 1901, perhaps the most luminous dissertation on the ethnological, social and economic conditions of the Island. A Government official report would be the last document the public would care to read for beauty of diction. But in Sir P. Arunachalam's account of the history and religions of the Island in his Census Report would be found the language of Addison, the eloquence of Macaulay and the historical insight of Mommsen."

Many of the reforms in the Registrar-General's Department involved extensive administrative changes and legislation. Arunachalam was responsible for the Ordinances Nos. 1 and 2 of 1895 on the Registration of Births, Marriages and Deaths, the Notaries Ordinance No.1 of 1907 and the Land Registration Ordinance No. 3 of 1907. The piloting of the last two Ordinances through the Legislative Council - a work normally assigned to the Attorney - General - was entrusted to Arunachalam by the Government. The question of the registration of titles to land and of the deeds affecting land was considered by a Commission presided over by the Chief Justice. In its report the Commission stated: " We cannot close our Report without acknowledging the valuable service rendered to the public by the Registrar-General, Mr. Arunachalam, in drafting this Ordinance. In submitting to His Excellency the result of our prolonged labours, we cannot claim for it perfection; but we venture to think that it will conduce to the interest of the public and to the suppression of much litigation and crime."

Arunachalam spent a great part of his working life as a Judge and it drew tributes from members of the highest tribunal in the Island. For example, Justice Moncrieff, acting Chief Justice, presiding at a public lecture delivered by Arunachalam said: "Mr. Arunachalam is a classical and oriental scholar, a master of the English language and literature, and brought to every task he undertook whether in literature, law or official work, habits of thoroughness and exactitude and a practical mind. *Nihil tetigit quod non ornavit.*" One of Arunachalam's best known judgments was in the well-known Adippola Sannas case, which dealt with obscure points in Sinhalese social history. It was a masterly study of the subject.

He published a volume entitled "Digest of Civil Law of Ceylon" dedicating it to the Marquess of Crewe, the son of Lord Houghton, his uncle's friend. This work was a pioneer and ambitious

undertaking as it sought to restate the huge indeterminate mass of Roman-Dutch law applicable to Ceylon. His aim was to reduce the civil law into a compact and systematic form distributed according to the natural and logical division of the subject matter, to ascertain and to compress into rules as far as possible the law regarding each subject, justifying each proposition by reference to authorities, in short to make a digest which could eventually be used by the Legislature in the preparation of an authoritative Code embodying such reforms as may be deemed expedient, on the lines of the great German Civil Code. He was able to complete the first volume only, sufficient for us to note the great pains he had taken to bring out a work of scholarship, at once systematic, compact and accurate. The book earned the praises of Lord Halsbury, the famous Lord Chancellor, and Sir Winfield Bonser, Chief Justice of Ceylon. Appreciative reviews appeared in both the Law Journal and Law Magazine of the United Kingdom. This 'Digest,' the non-completion of which has been deplored by many lawyers, has been cited on more than one occasion by the Supreme Court (see, for example, *Sadhanande Terunanse vs Sumanatissa*, 36 New Law Reports, page 423).

It is commonly supposed that Arunachalam's political activity began when he left the gilded cage of the Ceylon Civil Service in 1913. This is far from correct. He showed an interest in political study during his College days at Cambridge, and all throughout his official career continued to evince an active interest in the cause of his country's political development.

In his presidential address at the first Ceylon National Congress in 1919 he declared: "To me the Congress is the fulfillment of dreams cherished from the time I was an undergraduate at Cambridge". During those "never to be forgotten days", at Christ's College, Cambridge, where the inspiration of the traditions of Milton and Darwin was paramount, he lived in "intimate communion" with fellow students and teachers of "high ideals

and intellectual calibre", and came under the influence of political thinkers such as Sir John Seeley. It was at this time that Mazzini was forging a new Italy in Europe, and young Arunachalam in the company, among others, of two Indian fellow students, Syed Mohamed and Ananda Mohan Bose, began dreaming of a national renaissance in India and Ceylon. Syed Mohamed later became Judge of the High Court Bench at Allahabad and assisted his father in the establishment of the great Muslim College at Aligarh, while Ananda Mohan Bose who founded the Indian Association in England "nurtured the seed" which blossomed in due course into the powerful Indian National Congress.

Fortunately for Arunachalam and this country, as subsequent events showed, he found a kindred soul during his early days of his lonely Civil Service career in William Digby, an Englishman with a passion for justice and fair play, and who is remembered in Ceylon today as the author of a biography of Sir Richard Morgan. At the crowning moment of his life when he was ushering in the Ceylon National Congress as its first President, Arunachalam publicly acknowledged in his presidential address his gratitude to this great Englishman. From Arunachalam's talks and discussions with Digby emanated a historic pamphlet which Digby originally contributed to the "Calcutta Review" in January 1877, entitled "An Oriental Colony Ripe for Self-Government". This well reasoned documented production which demanded the introduction of Representative Government into Ceylon, did not evoke the expected response from the people or from the Government. It was indeed a cry in the wilderness. When, however, the field appeared to be fertile the pamphlet was republished in 1904 by Padmanabha, the eldest son of Arunachalam. Neither Arunachalam nor Digby was able to advance any further at this stage. Both were restrained by virtue of their official positions, one being a Civil Servant tied by Government regulations and traditions, and the other being a

paid servant of the "Observer", whose Editor and proprietor A. M. Ferguson was not disposed then to accelerate the pace of political reforms. Digby left Ceylon with a feeling of frustration and joined the "Madras Times". He invited Arunachalam to work with him in India. In 1878 Digby wrote to Arunachalam, "I wish with all my heart you were in India, and shall not forget your longing for a larger sphere and wider field than you occupy now. You will never make full use of your brilliant qualities of head and heart until you brave the obstacles round you and cease to lead the exclusive life you do now... We don't find your counterpart here. "

It is now fitting to record the interest Arunachalam always took in the affairs of India. He supported Digby's work in India during the great famine of 1878. He was disappointed with the indifference shown by the Viceroy, Lord Lytton, towards the welfare of the Indian people and in a letter to his friend Edward Carpenter wrote thus: "It is impossible to see and not to express one's opinion on the horrible injustice perpetrated by the English in and out of India towards the people. We cannot be expected to be always singing Hallelujahs in praise of English rule." The rebel in Arunachalam was fast gaining ground. It was during this time that he wrote, "I sometimes think that I should like to settle in a place like Poona and organise a political and social movement. But the Government will I feel persecute me however loyal I may be to British rule." In 1898 he stood up for Tilak, the Indian patriot, and in a letter to Carpenter he made the following apt comments on British administration in India: "The art of administration is a lost art in India. The Indian Government by its wanton extravagance in useless frontier wars, its oppressive taxes necessitated by such extravagance and by a too costly administration, by its utter want of sympathy with those who specially need it in the miserable time of plague and famine, and by its cruel treatment of patriots like Tilak... also by suppression

of reasonable and fair comments on the acts of its officials is doing its best to create disloyalty and bring about the downfall of British rule".

In 1893 Arunachalam wrote to Digby, requesting him to interview the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Lord Ripon, who was known to Digby, and urge on him the need for an immediate extension of Local Self-Government in Ceylon. In a letter dated 25th October, 1893, he said: "I have often thought that English administration in the East is far too centralised and gives the people no part in the administration of their local affairs, and thus the people have lost their old capacity for Self-Government and nearly become as helpless as children, while English officials neglect important matters and are obliged to leave a free hand to incompetent headmen who have no responsibility to the people..."

"Lord Ripon when in India took steps towards giving the villagers Self-Government in local affairs. In this direction lies administrative reform in Ceylon: but English Officials are so wedded to autocratic methods that they have no sympathy with this reform and will not give it a chance in spite of my pressing it on successive Governors.

"I believe that the people should be permitted to manage their own affairs - even if they make mistakes - and thus the cost of administration now so heavy will be reduced and it will be far more efficient and have an excellent effect on the people who will, in the management of their local affairs, find an outlet for their energies, now spent in litigation and gambling.

"Why should Englishmen who have admirable local self-government in their country be opposed to it here where local self-government in the villages was the rule for ages till the Europeans destroyed it? The cause is perhaps love of power, contempt of the native and the fact that the English Civilians come

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*To Sir P. Arunachalam  
Founder and First President C.S.S.L.  
from  
Ch. Arunachalam  
17th August 1920*

HEADQUARTERS OF THE CEYLON SOCIAL SERVICE LEAGUE



SIR PONNAMBALAM ARUNACHALAM

out to the East as mere youths without any knowledge of self-government at home."

Digby continued to urge and encourage Arunachalam. In 1901 Digby wrote the following memorable words to him. He said: "You may remember what our dreams were as young men when I was in Ceylon in the seventies... ..You and I were in earnest those days. I am not conscious of any change since then, rather as character has strengthened have the views deepened. You will soon retire from the service. Why should not we, old men, spend the rest of our days in ensuring that the visions of our youth shall find realisation. Life holds no greater ambition for me. Comrade, where standest thou? I crave for a reply and fighting together, I am always yours, William Digby."

Arunachalam heartened by such encouragement began to forge further ahead in agitating for reforms. The "Ceylon Observer" was now controlled by John Ferguson his uncle A.M.F having died in the fullness of years. John had moved with the times and was now ready to respond to Arunachalam's call. Early in June, 1902, Arunachalam communicated with Ferguson and this resulted in his writing a letter himself for publication in the "Observer" on the 7<sup>th</sup> June, 1902, under the pseudonym "Reform" requesting the Editor to use his influence to secure the reform of the Constitution as a Coronation gift to Ceylon, the occasion being the Coronation of King Edward VII. Ferguson printed this letter with a comment stating that the "author was a Ceylonese gentleman of local standing for whose cultured intelligence, steady industry and high character we have much respect." This letter was supported by an excellent editorial by Ferguson. Arunachalam followed his letter by a further communication elaborating his arguments and this appeared in the "Observer" of the 14th June 1902. Nothing concrete appears to have resulted from this correspondence, owing it is presumed to public apathy.

The Government now took note of Arunachalam's activities behind the scenes. They indirectly made it plain that his participation in this agitation was viewed with disfavour. Arunachalam was unruffled, but punishment came swiftly. He was transferred from his post in Colombo to be District Judge of Kurunegala. This was a humiliating reversion, but the blow was softened by his promotion to Grade II of the First Class of the Civil Service, a step which appears to have been done at the instance of the Secretary of State for the Colonies. It is a significant comment on the Government policy of the time that even a Ceylonese of Arunachalam's eminence was not appointed to the post of Government Agent. Justice Moncrieff expected Arunachalam to be appointed to the Supreme Court Bench in recognition of his judicial knowledge and experience. Chief Justice Layard was opposed to any such move, ostensibly on the ground that Arunachalam was a Civil Servant, and this deterred Governor Blake from promoting him to the Bench. Indeed, had he been an Englishman, there was no office in the Colonial Empire, not excluding the Governorship of Ceylon, which he could not have aspired to and adorned.

In 1905 after holding the office of District Judge of Kurunegala, he returned to the Registrar-General's Department, and in 1906 was nominated to the Legislative Council, where as stated earlier he was responsible for introducing and carrying through the Ordinances relating to the registration of titles to land and to Notaries. He sat on various Commissions in which his wide information was acknowledged to be of great value. In November 1909, Armand de Souza wrote to Arunachalam a letter, which well illustrates the keen interest Arunachalam continued to take in political reforms, while still a Government official. De Souza wrote: "Will you kindly bear in mind that now is the time for the real work of safeguarding the interests which you have furthered so far. The principles of the reforms may be accepted and yet rules so framed as to render the entire advantage nugatory. That

is what men like you have to lead us in guarding against." In 1912, Governor Sir Henry McCallum took the bold step of appointing him to the Executive Council. Sir Richard Morgan and Sir Samuel Grenier were the only Ceylonese before him to occupy permanent seats in the Executive Council but they did so by virtue of the offices they held. In Arunachalam's case the appointment was a personal one and it was ample proof of the high regard in which he was held by Sir Henry McCallum.

As a Councillor he showed remarkable courage and independence. When early in 1913 at the close of a debate in the Legislative Council on a Salaries Scheme, a division was called, quite a sensation was caused when Arunachalam was seen to rise from his seat and walk up to the Governor who was presiding. After a whispered consultation he returned to his seat and voted with the Unofficials against the Government. This was a unique incident in the history of Crown Colony government and indeed it caused widespread comment later in official and unofficial circles, and also in the public Press. It, however, showed the man, his conception of where his duty lay, his independence and his patriotism.

As regards his work in the Executive Council, Sir Anton Bertram, said at a public reception: "I was always struck by the character of his attainments. They always displayed a high feeling of the dignity of Government both in the largest and smallest aspects. Whatever question came before the Council, whether it was a large question or some question relative to the history of the past or religion of the people or if it were a question as to the new University College, all these great questions one could see in his official minutes always kindled in him a kind of unofficial enthusiasm. Not only was he so in large questions, but when he had to deal with the interests of the humblest cultivator in a Gansabhawa appeal, he showed the same earnestness, concentration and conscientiousness as in large questions. No

Ordinance was too long or too tedious for him to analyse. No question whether relative as I have said to the humble cultivator or the humble employee of the Railway failed to engage his earnest attention. He seemed to me to bring to his work all the highest qualities that the Executive Councillor should have."

He retired from the public service in 1913, with a record of achievement unsurpassed by any officer of the Crown. His official career will ever be a source of pride to Ceylonese. As a reward for his distinguished services extending for over 38 years he was knighted, receiving the accolade at the hands of King George V at Buckingham Palace. The initiative for conferring the honour came from the Colonial Office and not from any "men on the spot" in Ceylon. The grant of this honour was made an occasion for universal manifestations of keen satisfaction. Public receptions were accorded to him all over the country at which the most prominent members of communities vied with each other in showering encomiums on the new Knight.

After his strenuous labours in the Government service he would have been justified in seeking rest and solitude to give himself up to the philosophical study and contemplation which he loved so well. But he had dedicated his life to the service of his country. Freed from the shackles of office, he was determined to place his exceptional gifts at the disposal of his countrymen. He started another career which was to be more vital for them than that in the Civil Service.

In 1913 Sir Ponnambalam Arunachalam left for Europe and lost no time in settling down to a study of social service settlements, charity organisations, labour unions and Municipal institutions. He met Lord Chalmers the Governor-elect of Ceylon and immediately took upon himself the duty of advising him on matters relating to Ceylon. He wrote to him from his address at No. 4, Victoria Street, London S.W. a letter dated 15th July, 1913, in which he said: "There is now an agitation in Ceylon for the abolition of

the poll-tax, a tax payable by every able-bodied man except the Buddhist priest or Immigrant cooly. I have always thought it an inequitable tax, for it falls on the rich and the poor, and I have worked several years to abolish it. The rich are fortunate in Ceylon, for they pay nothing else except on luxuries. Some years ago a Commission was appointed to consider the subject of Incidence of Taxation, but it died without making a Report. Your financial knowledge will no doubt reveal to you gross anomalies and inequalities in the Ceylon System of Taxation. The most pressing Reform is the abolition or considerable reduction of the duty on salt, which is a Government Monopoly. Such a policy will be a great blessing to the poor and an encouragement to Agriculture for which salt is needed but not used owing to its cost. The rich, who, as tea and rubber planters and in the professions, make large incomes and the Companies, which make and send out of the Colony huge profits remain untouched. There is no income tax or land tax. The richer classes only pay the poll-tax equally with the poorest peasant. I cannot help thinking that the abortive result of the Commission on Taxation was largely due to the influence of the Capitalist classes and to the inadequate realisation by the Commissioners of the miserable conditions of the poor."

The riots of 1915 convinced Sir Ponnambalam that the agitation for political reforms could not be delayed any longer. He made strong representations to the Governor in a lengthy communication dated 6th July 1915, urging the appointment of an impartial Commission to ascertain the true cause of the riots and to check the indiscriminate condemnation of the Sinhalese people. He also wrote to his friends in England to support his efforts and specially acquainted Mr. (later Sir) Alexander Harris, of the Colonial Office, with the true facts of the disturbances. Mr. E. W. Perera in his speech at the unveiling of the portrait of Arunachalam on the 3rd March, 1937, at the Public Hall referred to his invaluable services in this connection as follows: "During the dark days of martial law when, in the words of the Mahavansa, Lanka was turned into

one house of mourning, Sir P. Arunachalam blazing with indignation like a lambent flame was doing all he possibly could to burn up and withdraw these iniquities and once again reduce to normal conditions". Alexander Harris was reported to have told Mr. Perera, "You know, Mr. Perera, my friend Sir P. Arunachalam has been writing private letters to me stating exactly the facts as you speak them and supporting your view of the case." Mr. Perera further stated that Alexander Harris was in personal touch with the Secretary of State for the Colonies, and they would hardly realize the effect that Arunachalam's intervention had in the little redress they had secured for the wrong done them under Martial Law.

In an epoch-making lecture on "Our Political Needs," delivered at the request of Mr. D. R. Wijewardene, Secretary of the Ceylon National Association at its annual general meeting on 2<sup>nd</sup> April 1917, at the Victoria Masonic Hall, Colombo, with Mr. E. J. Samarawickreme in the chair, Arunachalam crystallised the arguments for self-government. Sir James Peiris referring to this notable event said: "Although there were several agitators for political reform in Ceylon from time to time, the people woke to the necessity of persistent and organised agitation only after Sir P. Arunachalam delivered his address on 'Our Political Needs'... I would ask especially those young men who are studying politics to read that lecture and cognate publications of Sir P. Arunachalam and treat them as a sort of political bible."

In 1918 Sir Ponnambalam contributed the inaugural message published in the first issue of the "Ceylon Daily News" in which he said: "In our zeal for political reform we must be on our guard against making it an end. We seek it only as a means to an end. We seek it not to win rights, but to fulfil duties - duties to ourselves and our country... People, like individuals, have each a divinely appointed end, a distinct task to perform." He continued: "I look to our youth to spiritualise public life and I believe they will do it.

They will each seek his own well-being in the well-being of all, will identify his own life with the life of all and his own interest with the interest of all. They will lay at the feet of our dear Motherland the love-offerings of passionate service. They will work in unity that, in the words of Dante, all the intellectual and spiritual forces diffused among men may obtain the highest possible development in the sphere of thought and action. With our youth inspired by such a spirit and such ideals, I look to see our country rise with renewed splendour, paling the glory of Parakrama Bahu the Great and a beacon-light to all lands." These are words, which can draw forth the best in man; memorable and inspiring, they are a call to every young Ceylonese to dedicate his life to the service of the country.

Arunachalam founded in May, 1917, the Ceylon Reform League with the object of securing self-government, and organised two political conferences, one in December, 1917 and the other in December 1918. In August, 1919 he prepared the "Case for Constitutional Reform in Ceylon" and published it the following month, in the name of the Joint-Committee of the Ceylon Reform League and the Ceylon National Association. On the 20th September, 1919, he delivered an address to a Sinhalese Conference under the patronage of Mr. F. R. Senanayake for the purpose of organising Peoples' Associations throughout the Sinhalese districts of the Island for political, social and economic improvement. This movement directly gave birth to the Lanka Maha Jana Sabha and it is well that we are reminded of the words that Arunachalam uttered when he wished it every success at the beginning. He said: "I feel sure that you will all work zealously to make this movement a thorough success, in the interests of yourselves, and your families and of our dear Motherland of Lanka."

Fast on the heels of this meeting, on the 24th September, 1919, at the Tower Hall, Colombo, Arunachalam delivered an address on the "Present Political Situation". All this spadework culminated



in the inauguration on the 11th December, 1919, of the Ceylon National Congress of which he was unanimously elected first President. Mr. C. E. Corea described the founding of the Congress in the following picturesque language: "In later years, in this centre of energy (Colombo), a great man possessed of a keen and observant eye looked and saw in the distance the glow of the scattered sparks of individual enthusiasms, smouldering in isolation towards extinguishment. And the great man arose and made haste: and he went forth and gathered up those far-flung embers, energised them with his own burning patriotism and brought them together in one great life-giving furnace of national endeavour; the crucible in which was shaped and formed this, the Ceylon National Congress. The Congress is the off-spring of the late Sir Ponnambalam's noble enthusiasm."

Judged only by the services rendered to Ceylon in the cause of political reform Arunachalam would have been entitled to the lasting gratitude of his countrymen, but his massive intellect, boundless energy and his wide range of sympathy led him to other fields of human endeavour. While Arunachalam whipped up enthusiasm among his countrymen to fight for the political emancipation of Ceylon, he was not unmindful of the great need to uplift the social conditions of the people and to impress on the privileged classes that they had a duty towards their less fortunate brethren. As early as 1904 Arunachalam was asked by Governor Blake to preside over a Commission to enquire into and report on the steps which should be taken for the education of the Rodiyas of Ceylon. With him were associated. Mr. Harward, the Director of Public Instruction, the Hon. Mr. S. N. W. Hulugalle, the representative of the Kandyans in the Legislative Council, and the Rev. R. C. Oliver, a Christian Missionary. The Commissioners took five months to make their enquiries and draft their report which was a comprehensive study of the conditions under which the Rodiyas lived and the measures that should be taken to educate them for citizenship.



SIR PONNAMBALAM ARUNACHALAM



STATUE OF ARUNACHALAM

When he visited England in 1913 he took the opportunity to study social service work. He had visited the London County Councils and the Local Government Board as well as the Education Office and studied their systems of primary education, housing their poor, and had also inspected their infirmaries and workhouses. An entry in his diary for May 12<sup>th</sup>, 1913, states: "Visited the Local Government Board and shown round by Mr. Burns. Thence to Hammersmith Infirmity and Workhouse. Splendid provision for the poor. Number of inmates 779. Afterwards the London County Council Education Office, and got much information of education of the masses. Great need for social service work in Ceylon. Must organise a movement of service for the people. There is much to be done to house the poor in Colombo, primary education of the masses, and emancipation of the coolies from their present slavery."

He lost no time on his return to Ceylon to begin great work to improve the lot of his fellowmen. Realising that the youth of a nation are the trustees of posterity he gathered round him a band of enthusiastic young men and instilled into them the spirit of social service. He summoned a few persons to his Colombo residence, "Ponklar" at Horton Place, on the 19th November, 1914, and expounded his views and imparted his burning passion for the poor, saying: "We must study the needs of the masses and bring to their doors knowledge, recreation, and brighten and beautify their lives and establish a bond of sweet human relationship between the educated and wealthy and their less favoured brethren. The work is almost appalling, and includes education for the masses, medical relief, economic improvements, and the improvement of their housing, and teaching them to lead cleaner and better lives by coming into personal contact with them in homes and giving medical relief as well as securing the benefits of compulsory insurance and minimum wages."

With the active co-operation of Sir James Peiris, Sir Ponnambalam inaugurated the Ceylon Social Service League at a

general meeting held on the 29<sup>th</sup> January 1915. Arunachalam was elected its first President and the rules drafted by him were adopted by the League. Arunachalam succeeded in infusing his enthusiasm for social service into a band of willing and active workers. Not content with merely making suggestions or giving advice, he set the standard for the sincere social worker by himself working 8 to 10 hours a day at the League Headquarters and personally conducting a social study class for the training of members for the great work they were to begin. He started night schools and instructed workers in lane visitation. He organised lantern lectures on sanitation and hygiene and built depots and athletic clubs for the children of the slums. Industrial education to enable a child to earn a living was also taken up and cottage industries of the villages, which were fast dying out, were revived. For this purpose he suggested the creation of co-operative credit societies to help the people to develop industrial and agricultural enterprises, the Government helping with loans for buying raw material, improved implements and machinery for industries such as pottery, basket and furniture making, silver and brass work, lace making and cotton weaving.

In paying a tribute to his work for the social uplift of the people of the poorer classes on the occasion of the unveiling of his portrait by the Governor, Sir Anton Bertram, the Chief Justice said: "Sir Ponnambalam was a man of wide and varied culture. There never had been a man of more distinguished culture in this Colony. He did not live wrapt in his own studies and books. He felt the sorrows of the common people. He did not start the social service movement because it was a fashionable movement. He realised the sorrows of the poor and heard what Wordsworth called 'the still sad voice of humanity.' He felt for the dwellers of the slums and every one of them should cherish as one of their most precious ideals their duty to follow the example of Sir Ponnambalam".

While engaged in social service work, he did not overlook the interests of labour. The first labour union that was established in

Ceylon was founded by Sir Ponnambalam on the 25<sup>th</sup> June, 1919. Until then the Ceylon Social Service League looked after the interests of labour under the guidance of Sir Ponnambalam. The new organisation was called the Ceylon Workers' Welfare League. Sir Ponnambalam was elected its first President and Mr. Peri Sunderam its first Secretary. The aim of the League as stated in its constitution was "To protect the interests of the working classes in Ceylon and promote their welfare; to improve their social and industrial conditions and help their material and moral development; and to encourage the study of questions bearing on the social and economic conditions of the people."

The League took a leading part in the negotiations between employers and labourers during the Railway and Harbour strikes of 1921. The Rev. C. F. Andrews visited Ceylon at the invitation of the League in order to examine the conditions of Indian Labour on the Ceylon plantations. Mr. Andrews addressed a large meeting of workers and supporters in September, 1920, at the Tower Hall under the chairmanship of Sir Ponnambalam. Col. Josiah Wedgewood, another champion of the labour movement, arrived in Ceylon in 1921 and similarly addressed large meetings. In February 1920, Sir Ponnambalam enlarged his labour organisations and established the Ceylon Workers Federation. Sir Ponnambalam never ceased to encourage these organisations to strive for the amelioration of the conditions of the working classes. He endeavoured to make himself, in the words of the Mahavansa "one with the people". It was largely due to his efforts that the penal clauses in the Labour Ordinance were repealed. His Unions fought hard against the "Thundu" system, then operating oppressively against Indian labourers; and indeed these Unions were the only effective organisations then existing in the Island to watch and protect the interests of labour. Colonel Wedgewood paid a glowing tribute to Sir Ponnambalam in a speech in the House of Commons on the 14<sup>th</sup> July, 1921. He said: "I should like in this connection to mention the great work done for these semi- slaves

in Ceylon by two men, one in India-Mr. Andrews, and the other an old Government Servant, Sir Ponnambalam Arunachalam. He has gone on year after year, with society after society, pegging away at this question. He is unpopular with Officials because he was an Official. He is educated, he is alive to abolishing this cooly labour, and I congratulate him, as one can from these Benches, on having achieved the liberation of a large mass of his labouring countrymen." Wedgewood had the highest regard for Sir Ponnambalam and in a foreword to a book on Sir Ponnambalam's speeches and writings stated: "There is a good deal to be said for Cambridge which could produce an Arunachalam and a J. C. Smuts". Lord Crewe wrote to him on the 27<sup>th</sup> July 1922 "You must indeed be gratified at the successful close of your long exertions on behalf of the Indian coolies. It is a real service to the Empire to bring contentment to these people who deserve well of us all."

Education too engaged the attention of Arunachalam. He was dissatisfied with the existing system and on many occasions he made suggestions for reforms in this field. In 1900, Arunachalam had a serious talk on the subject with S. M. Burrows, Director of Public Instruction, who was so impressed that he asked Arunachalam to embody his views in a memorandum. On the 8<sup>th</sup> July, 1900, Arunachalam submitted his notes to the Director of Public Instruction. In these notes he went right to the heart of the matter when he stated that the fundamental defect in the system of elementary education in Colombo was that English was employed as the medium of Instruction. In a real sense he was the father of Swabasha. He pointedly asked the Director of Public instruction to "think what it would be in England if, say, German was made the medium of instruction in the elementary schools and English was entirely excluded. And German is more akin to English and less difficult to an English child than English is to a Sinhalese or Tamil."

He went further into detail and suggested various measures to remedy the defects of the educational system. Burrows warmly

thanked Arunachalam for his views, but it later became evident in the correspondence that passed between Arunachalam and Burrows, the latter was not ready to adopt the reforms suggested. Arunachalam now appealed to higher authority and sent a copy of his memorandum to the Governor, Sir West Ridgeway, along with a letter dated 30<sup>th</sup> April, 1900, requesting the Government to appoint a Commission to report on educational progress and needs. In this memorandum he appealed to the Government to create "a Ceylon University" or at least raise Royal College to the status of a University College. This would be, he said, "a lasting benefit to the people and a fitting monument to His Excellency's rule in Ceylon." The reply that he received dashed all hopes. It stated: "Your memorandum on Education was duly considered and circulated in the Executive Council. His Excellency on the 15<sup>th</sup> October decided to take no action." Arunachalam did not however accept defeat and continued to correspond with Burrows, always suggesting various educational improvements. For instance, he suggested Ceylon and Indian History and Geography in place of English History and Geography. He continued to take a keen interest in the progress of Royal College and always insisted on its being run as a model secondary school. It was during this period that Arunachalam delivered a series of lectures on Ceylon History and attempted to revive an interest in the subject both in schools and among the literate population.

Sir Ponnambalam has been rightly called the father of the Ceylon University movement. He was responsible for the Ceylon University Association which was formed in January, 1906, The Journal that this Association published was a first class and most readable magazine. With regard to Sir Ponnambalam's association with the University, one can do no better than quote the admirable remarks of Professor Marrs, the first Principal of the University College, and himself a fine product of Western culture. When the news of Arunachalam's death at Madura reached Ceylon, Marrs

summoned the students of the University College to the main hall and addressed them as follows: "Gentlemen, I have asked you to assemble here at this hour as a mark of respect to the memory of one who was in a very real sense the Father of the University project in Ceylon. Much has been written already of his varied distinction and activities as servant of the Government, Politician, Scholar, Savant, Educationist and Social Reformer. Little or nothing has been said of that side of his activities which to those who were in close touch with him was the inspiration of his latter days - the side which concerns you and me as member of an institution so dear to his heart, the Ceylon University College. I may remind you that Sir Arunachalam presided over the Public Meeting which was called to consider the question of the establishment of a University in Ceylon on the 19th January, 1906, and I should like to quote to you the concluding words of his address at that meeting, a meeting which led to the formation of the Ceylon University Association. ' In seeking therefore to form a Ceylon University Association we are not only following precedent but doing an indispensable work. We do not commit ourselves to the form the University is to take, to the details of its organisation as to teaching, examination, etc. Those are matters that must be developed later, and on which at present there cannot but be difference of opinion. Meanwhile, whatever scheme for higher education may be now before the public, whether in connection with Cambridge, London or Madras may be pursued without let or restraint. These schemes, it is generally felt, are transitional and require modification to suit our special needs. The aim of our Association will be to make this period of transition not long or fruitless, and to strive for the establishment of a University which will be the crown of a well ordered series of elementary and secondary schools and colleges, which will systematize and concentrate the energies now dissipated in various institutions for general and professional education and which will render it impossible for our schools and colleges to go in a drowsy

and impotent routine, but will raise the culture of our people ever higher and higher by their means.'

"From that day to the day of his decease Sir Arunachalam has pursued his object to use his own words 'without let or restraint' undeterred by the doubts of men without vision or the delay to which an untried project must, I suppose, always be subjected by conservers of tradition. No man in this Island has pressed his advocacy of the University with so clear a conception of its ultimate significance to the political progress of his country or with such single minded and forceful enthusiasm. The outward evidence of his interest, we at the College know. There is first and foremost his great gift of the Padmanabha Library whose value has in my opinion not yet been sufficiently realised. There is the bequest of the Sir Coomaraswamy Science Prize and his generous donation to the Union Hostel. But these are as nothing compared with the gift of time, energy and thought to the affairs of the College, not only as a member of the College Council and the Academic Committee but as one who was ever ready to extend help and advice to those on whom has fallen the task of guiding the destinies of the College and preparing the foundations of the University of Ceylon. Here I speak with fuller knowledge than others. From the time I landed in this country, which he loved and for whose good all must agree - I have been in the closest contact with him and can assure you - that he gave of his best in will and thought and time to the furtherance of our project. When progress seemed impossible it was he who confounded the pessimist and inspired to fresh efforts. It is not easy for me as Principal of the College to measure the debt of gratitude, which I owe to his courtesy, encouragement and support or to express the deep sorrow and sense of personal loss, which I felt when I read of his death. Gentlemen, you have in him who has just left us an example and an inspiration. Whatever the difference between him and others in religion or politics, he is an example of certain human qualities, which lie at the root of all greatness and which you will do well

to emulate in your adult lives. Of these I would single out moral courage, independent judgment, and single-minded pursuit of the ideal. He fought the good fight for his ideal in the spirit of the poet's admonition to his soul:

*'Heart, Heart, still vexed with troubles past enduring,  
Up and be doing, steel thy self and stay  
Mid thronging foeman to the last enduring,  
Steadfast amid the forefront of the fray.'*

His proximate ideal was the University. But his ultimate ideal was the ideal of all of us to raise the natural tone of his countrymen by turning out as generation succeeds generation, ever increasing numbers of true men, men of thought and men of action who think and act according to the highest standards or human civilisation.

No review of Sir Ponnambalam Arunachalam's life will be complete without a reference to his remarkable scholarly and literary attainments. Always a keen student, he devoted his leisure hours to the cultivation of the humanities. In the midst of arduous official duties he never failed to read the Classics, to delve into history and archaeology, and study Western and Oriental philosophy. He published a small book entitled "Sketches of Ceylon History" based on his public lectures, a very useful handbook at a time when no such studies existed and the Ceylonese were reproached for their ignorance of their country's history. As a Civil Servant, he was both a good administrator and a scholar. This combination of gifts was found in some European Civil Servants of an earlier generation, but was remarkable, if not unique, for Ceylonese at that time, although Arunachalam has had notable successors in the same tradition, for example Sir Paul E. Pieris. He led a cultured life, and his hobbies were those of a cultured man. He was the President of the Royal Asiatic Society and contributed numerous papers on Tamil literature and Ceylon history. His reputation as a scholar spread far beyond these shores.

In cultured circles in England he was always welcome, and while in England he had the privilege of being admitted to the membership of the Athenaeum Club.

Sir Anton Bertram on one occasion said of Sir Ponnambalam Arunachalam that "it was a privilege to find in him the rare combination of a scholar and a gentleman," and indeed those who knew him intimately will always remember his engaging manner, his courtly bearing and his charming old-world courtesy. Edward Carpenter gave an estimate of his friend in the following words: "I was often impressed by the ease and celerity with which he drank in and absorbed all sorts of difficult and recondite matters (doubly difficult to a foreigner) as, e.g., a question of procedure in the House of Commons, while at the same time this receptiveness was healthily counterbalanced by a certain almost elfish spirit of chaff and opposition which one might notice at times." Colonel Olcott who met Arunachalam when he was a Magistrate at Kalutara left this record in his "Old Diary Leaves": "We made a charming acquaintance today, a graduate of Christ's College, Cambridge, one of the most intellectual and polished men we have met in Asia."

Although his mind teemed with the wise maxims of many religions and philosophies, he was an orthodox Hindu first, and all things afterwards. Sir C. P. Ramaswami Aiyar writing a foreword to a posthumous publication of Arunachalam's philosophical and religious "Studies and Translations" said: "The world cannot be sufficiently grateful to Sir Ponnambalam Arunachalam for having in his philosophical and religious 'Studies and Translations' unlocked these treasures of thought and of language to those wholly or partially unacquainted with the wonders of Tamil thought and Tamil poesy. Although in the case of some of the earliest poets and poetesses of the Tamil land the language was direct and simple, nevertheless, as time went by, the craftsmanship of the seer grew more and more intricate and the language

became so compressed that adequate guidance has become necessary for their comprehension. In a series of essays, some dealing with the worship of the Devi and of Skanda and some setting out selections from Manikkavasagar, Thayumanavar and other bhaktas like Nakkirar and the author of Purananuru, Sir P. Arunachalam has elucidated their phraseology and introduced us to their thought forms and their aspirations... The task of translation from these classics is inexpressibly difficult and no higher praise can be given than to say that Sir P. Arunachalam's translations enable us to comprehend the spirit and some part of the formal beauty of the original... In a carefully arranged series of essays which display a unique acquaintance with European literature - classical and modern - in addition to a mastery over Eastern lore, he has discussed such varied subjects as 'Luminous Sleep' - the sleep in which while there is rest and absence of thought, there is no darkness or oblivion but perfect consciousness, a state of being which has been referred to in Plato and Tennyson and realised by the Yogis of India. He discourses on the symbolism of Siva worship with special reference to the Bronzes found at Polonnaruwa and in the course of his monograph points out that 'a correct judgment of a nation's Art is not possible unless a critic divests himself of prepossessions and endeavours to understand the thought of that people and places himself in their point of view.' He has shown that orthodox Hindu teaching held it to be illogical to found artistic ideals of the Divine upon strictly human prototypes and he makes the pregnant observation that spiritual vision is the best and the truest standard. Pointing out the contrasts between Greek Art and Indian he has made possible the true conception of the sculptural and architectural symbolism of the East. Not the least valuable and stimulating amongst the essays collected in this volume is the reprint of an Address on the "Eastern Ideals of Education and their bearing on Modern Problems" wherein Sir P. Arunachalam has traced the history and mission of the forest Universities of India and the method of their striving for true

knowledge and has instituted a comparison and contrast between the modes of approach in the East and in the West to the ultimate problems of education for life and for the after-life. Although the book is styled 'Studies and Translations' there is embedded in it much original thought evolved by one to whom Greek, Latin, Sanskrit and Tamil literature were equally open books. The significance and value of his contributions are enhanced by the circumstance that the author was not a cloistered *savant* nor a recluse but was one who, as a great lawyer and administrator, exemplified in his own life the possibilities of that combination of worldly and other-worldly achievement, the supreme exemplar of which was King Janaka of Mithila. It was my privilege to have personally known Sir P. Arunachalam and his equally distinguished brother, Sir P. Ramanathan, and I account it a piece of good fortune to have the privilege of introducing this volume to a world which will be all the better for the knowledge and assimilation of that varied culture whereof the author was an exponent as well as an embodiment."

With the assistance of Messrs. C. Namasivayagam, N. Ratnasabapathy and Mr. (now Gate-Mudaliyar) C. Thiagarajah, Arunachalam re-formed the Colombo Saiva Paripalana Sabhai, a Hindu religious organisation which encouraged the study and practice of Hinduism, into the Ceylon Saiva Paripalana Sabhai of which he was the first President. In many ways he helped to safeguard the Kataragama Shrine and the properties attached to it. He came under the influence of a religious teacher in South India by the name of Illakanam Ramasamy (grandfather of the Hon. Mr. S. Natesan) who was held in the highest esteem by all who knew him. He introduced his friend Edward Carpenter to this *Gnani* and the three of them met often to commune and discuss spiritual matters at Kurunegala where Arunachalam was District Judge.

Arunachalam married Svarnam, daughter of Namasivayam Mudaliyar of Manipal in 1883. They had eight children, three

sons and four daughters. Padmanabha, the eldest son, predeceased his father in 1920, and Ramanathan the youngest son died in 1939. The only surviving son is Sir Arunachalam Mahadeva, himself a Ceylonese leader and statesman. Among his daughters, two predeceased him, Mrs. Mahesvari Segarajasingham and Mrs. Manonmani Sri Pathmanathan. Those now living are Mrs. Padmavati Pararajasingam, Mrs. Sivanandam Tambyah and Mrs. Sundari Nadaraja. Lady Arunachalam, his devoted widow, died in 1940.

Sir Ponnambalam made his last appearance on the Ceylon National Congress platform when he presided at a public meeting held under the auspices of the Congress in February, 1921, to enable Colonel Wedgewood to address the people. Soon afterwards, on the 15th March 1921, he addressed a meeting on the "Present Political Situation." Here he said: "Being no longer President of the Ceylon National Congress I am able to speak more freely. I surrendered that office last October, having accomplished the task I had set to myself in 1916 of organising the reform movement, of educating the public, keeping all the forces, liberal and conservative and radical, together and securing agreement on the minimum demand for a reasonable reform of our constitution. Having done that I felt that I could work more effectively as a private individual unshackled by official ties, for the people and the reform cause and carry it to a further stage." A misunderstanding developed between the Sinhalese and Tamil Members of the Congress over the question of representation. This caused an estrangement between him and the Congress, but he never regarded it as anything but a passing phase.

In order to organise and possibly to guide Tamil public opinion on right lines, Sir Ponnambalam founded the Ceylon Tamil League in 1923 and wanted to make it mainly a cultural organisation that would embrace Tamil activities in Ceylon, South India and the Tamil colonies. He did not live long enough to develop the cultural activities of the Tamil League and at the same time effect a

*rapprochement* with the Sinhalese, a consummation for which he devoutly wished.

Towards the end of 1923 he undertook a pilgrimage to the sacred shrines of India and there in a remarkably appropriate setting for a man of his deep religious convictions the final scene was enacted. In the midst of his devotions he passed away on the 9th January, 1924, leaving behind him the richest of legacies - the memory of a life nobly spent in the services of his country and its people. The news of his death hushed the voice of controversy. Friends and political opponents vied with one another to pay their last tributes to their departed leader. The last rites were performed at the General Cemetery, Colombo, in the presence of a vast concourse of people all bemoaning that his death had caused a void which was impossible to fill.

Soon after his death a movement was set afoot to perpetuate his memory, with Sir James Peiris as Chairman of the Arunachalam Statue Committee. A bronze statue was erected on the grounds of the Council Chamber and unveiled on the 23rd April 1930, by the Governor. The inscription on the pedestal of this statue reads as follows :

**SIR PONNAMBALAM ARUNACHALAM**  
**SCHOLAR- STATESMAN-ADMINISTRATOR**  
**PATRIOT**  
**ERECTED BY A GRATEFUL PEOPLE**  
**IN**  
**TESTIMONY OF A LIFE NOBLY SPENT**  
**IN THE SERVICE OF HIS COUNTRY AND**  
**IN RECOGNITION OF HIS PRE-EMINENT**  
**AND SIGNAL SERVICES AS THE CHAMPION**  
**OF A REFORMED LEGISLATURE AND OF**  
**HIS MATCHLESS DEVOTION AND STEADFASTNESS**  
**IN THE CAUSE OF THE CEYLON UNIVERSITY**  
**1853 - 1924**



Arunachalam's portraits were unveiled at his old School, Royal College and at the offices of the Ceylon Social Service League and the Ceylon National Congress. The University of Ceylon has named one of its Halls of Residence Arunachalam Hall. Among Arunachalam's benefactions there were rich endowments set apart by him for the University of Ceylon.

He was a man of wide and varied parts, a great man whose fame, as the years roll by, will shine brighter in the judgment of history. He had a lofty conception of duty and a high sense of honour. He had all the qualities of a statesman. He had vision to a remarkable degree. Often he was heard to say with the Writer of the Proverbs, "Where there is no vision the people perish." He had courage. He had faith. His zeal was infectious. He brought the different elements in the country together and by the force of personality welded them into one body and breathed into them the spirit of public service and high patriotic endeavour. In the heart of almost every man and woman in the country a national consciousness has been quickened which will not die.

When we consider Sir Ponnambalam Arunachalam's life as a whole, we come before a man of strong will, clear vision, character, industry, and efficiency, who having towered above the giants of his own day still remains an example and inspiration to succeeding generations of Ceylonese. Whenever Ceylon attempts to trace to their roots the several causes of her progress she will invariably arrive at the father of the Ceylonese Renaissance, Sir Ponnambalam Arunachalam, who in the words of his contemporary and friend, Sir James Peiris, "did more for the political re-organisation of the Island and for the social advancement of the people than almost anyone in the past or recent times."

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