

**T A M I L**  
**AS**  
**OFFICIAL LANGUAGE**

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*Retrospect and*  
*Prospect*

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**A. THEVA RAJAN**

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International Centre for Ethnic Studies  
Colombo

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## Foreword

This study was commissioned by ICES (Colombo) as part of a project on which it was engaged to promote the implementation of the provisions regarding official languages in the 13th and 16th Amendments to the Sri Lankan Constitution, adopted in 1987.

Other activities undertaken under the project included the organisation, in collaboration with the Department of Official Languages, of two workshops on official languages — one, in relation to administration and the other, in relation to education. The first of these workshops led to the creation by an Act of Parliament, of an Official Languages Commission — a body whose establishment was first proposed by us at that workshop. The Commission was empowered, as we had proposed, to monitor the implementation of the constitutional amendments regarding language, receive representations and complaints by the public, and initiate remedial action, where necessary.

Another activity undertaken as part of the same project was the making of four films on different aspects of the question of official languages. These were offered to the Sri Lanka Rupavahini Corporation but not shown at that time; they have, however, been screened by us for other audiences.

Mr. Theva Rajan's study deals with the important subject of Tamil as an official language. While drawing in its early pages on history and ancient texts to demonstrate the recognition that the Tamil language and culture received in pre-colonial Sri Lanka, it traces the process by which official language became a controversial and conflictual issue in post-independence Sri Lanka. There were hopes that the acceptance of Tamil as 'also an official language' by the constitutional amendments of 1987 would remove language from the arena of political conflict, and ruling politicians often claimed subsequently that the problem had finally been solved. Mr. Theva Rajan's study provides ample evidence that this has not in fact happened because of the scant attention given to the practical implementation of the constitutional amendments regarding language. Nor did the establishment of the Official Languages Commission substantially change the picture because, in spite of the wide powers given to it by the Act, the Commission did not make more than sporadic and piecemeal interventions to promote implementation.

Although Mr. Theva Rajan's study was completed in 1992, the state of affairs he describes remained essentially the same down to the change of government in 1994. It is to be hoped that the commitment of the new government to ethnic peace and justice will find expression also in the field of language policy. The effective protection of the language rights of all sections of the people is an essential condition of real democracy and of popular consciousness that the State is not an alien body.

**Editor, ICES (Colombo)**

## **CHAPTER I**

### **TAMIL THROUGH THE AGES IN SRI LANKA**

Start with a country. Call this country a democracy. Say that in this polity a third of the population speaks an indigenous language as old as any other major language spoken within that country.

You might think that such a language, neither alien nor an alien's tongue, would of necessity have long ago found its rightful place within the official policy of that country.

Yet the path which the Tamil language has taken toward receiving official recognition and usage within Sri Lanka can hardly be described as easy.

In order to better see the past and current situation, and to illuminate future roads, this paper presents the course taken to make the mother tongue of nearly a third of the total population of Sri Lanka an official language. To understand this movement toward official recognition, we might first appraise the long-term historical position which Tamil has occupied in this country.

Ancient epigraphical and literary sources reveal widespread usage of the Tamil language. The earliest lithic records in the Brahmi script, precursor to the modern-day Sinhala and Tamil alphabets, bear eloquent testimony to the popular usage of the Tamil language during the 3rd century B.C., if not earlier. Incidentally, no evidence of the use of any other languages or script prior to this period has surfaced thus far. We might also consider the manner in which current Sinhala script manifests the influence of the Indian-originated Pallava Grantha script.<sup>1</sup>

As a script, Brahmi reveals fossil traces of ancient linguistic movements and usage. From Sri Lanka's southernmost tip Denavara, now called Devinuwara or Dondra Head, stretching north to the Indian border with Afghanistan, to the shores of Egypt's Red Sea and portions of the former Soviet Union border with West Asia, Brahmi was used universally. As a kind of widespread Esperanto, Brahmi apparently facilitated various forms of cultural and commercial exchange within Asia and the Middle East.<sup>2</sup>

Brahmi bears several different forms, but it is interesting to note that Sri Lanka's early Brahmi proves identical with South Indian Brahmi. After the significant archaeological find of Bhatiprolu, in Andhra, Buhler differentiated South Indian Brahmi as Dravidi. This Dravidi can be found in lithic traces of the ancient Indian Pandyan Kingdom<sup>3</sup>, though it now goes by the appellation of Tamil Brahmi.<sup>4</sup>

For our argument, it is interesting to consider that Tamil Brahmi predates what is known as Asokan Brahmi,<sup>5</sup> a form taken in Sri Lanka only from the first century A.D.<sup>6</sup>

The earliest Brahmi inscriptions of Sri Lanka are generally said to be in the Prakrit language. Rather than denoting any particular language, Prakrit simply means "old language". To further complicate the matter, among experts, terms differ.

Where Wilhelm Geiger will prefer to use the term the "Sinhala Prakrit" Senarat Paranavitane will say "old Sinhalese".

Yet no matter the terms used to identify this lithic language, both well-reputed scholars have managed to ignore the presence of Tamil names and Tamil words in the Prakrit inscriptions. Obviously Tamil words such as Perumaka(n), Perumakal, Marumakan, Kaviti, Abi, among others, make a prominent appearance in these most ancient of Sri Lankan inscriptions.

Further, Tamil names, such as Siva, Yasopala, and Gopal, for example, as well as the names of Tamil social groups or clans like those of the Utiya (n), Ays, Vels, Barata, Naga and others, show that the popular language was at the very least a mixture of Tamil, Dravidian, or proto-Dravidian languages.<sup>7</sup> Velupillai has skillfully demonstrated the influence of Tamil even on linguistic aspects.<sup>8</sup>

Tamil classical literature of the Sangam period bears a great number of words revealing Tamil or Dravidian roots. This influence has led Ragupathy to suggest that area languages may have shared a common base proto-Dravidian language.<sup>9</sup>

From our examination of linguistic traces alone, it becomes apparent that the Tamil language was one popularly used by the inhabitants of Sri Lanka. But even more significantly, such traces reveal how vital was the role played by the Tamils in the social, religious and political affairs of Sri Lanka far before the advent of Christianity.

If we consider the ancient seat of kingship in the city of Anuradhapura, for example, we find what is called the "Tamil Householders Terrace Inscription", written in a Brahmi script dating from between the 3rd and 1st century B.C. The inscription reads as follows: "The terrace of the Tamil Householders caused to be made by the Tamil Samara, residing at Ila. Bharata." Paranavitane observed that this inscription "proves that the stone terrace was the common property of the Tamil Householders of ancient Anuradhapura":

... and was probably used as their assembly hall ... The platform on which it is inscribed is also one of the earliest examples of the earliest stone work of the Tamil people and the monument therefore deserves the notice of Indian archaeologists.<sup>10</sup>

That a Tamil ruin in Sri Lanka should be a peer to the oldest of Tamil ruins in India begins to evince the long history of the Tamils in Sri Lanka.

This history includes more than mere settlement. The Tamil contribution to Buddhism in both Sri Lanka and, incidentally, India helped vivify the Sangha. Upon the flight of stairs in Sri Lanka's Matale Thalagahogoda Vihara, for example, we find an inscription in early Brahmi which dates from the 2nd century B.C. From this commemoration, one learns of a Tamil Bhikkhu who had donated the cave to the Maha Sangha.<sup>11</sup>

Such material offering extends even into literary contribution: it is no secret that some of the earliest works of Sri Lankan Buddhist literature were written by Tamil Buddhist monks.

This admixture recurs when we note how often Sinhalese kings ordered inscriptions to be engraved in Tamil; even within Sinhalese inscriptions, the kings dictated enough telltale Tamil words to reveal the court's language true blend. For instance, in the tenth century A.D., King Kassapa V had ordered to be engraved two inscriptions. The **Atavirogollava Pillar Inscription** and the **Rajamaligawa Pillar Inscription** both possess Tamil names and words like Loganathan(n), Mekappar, Murandu, and Peranattu.<sup>12</sup>

Another example of this admixture, in this case, of referents, can be found in Poonagari,<sup>13</sup> located in Sri Lanka's northern mainland: a potsherd in Brahmi mentions a village called Velangama, referring to a village whose inhabitants belong to the Tamil class of the Vels.<sup>14</sup>

Again in the tenth century A.D., some of King Mahinda IV's inscriptions employ the following Tamil words: Viyal (Vayal), Nel, Veli, Varian, Nattiyam, and Mekappar, among others. More significantly, the same Mahinda decreed:

In all the places irrigated by the tank, the distribution of water shall be utilized for this Vihare only, in accordance with ancient customs in vogue formerly during the Tamil period [of rule.]<sup>15</sup>

One can conjecture that even this Vihare had been built by Tamils. When speaking of the all-important issue of land allotments to Tamil residents, some of the royal inscriptions use names beginning with the Sinhalese word for Tamil Demel, such as Demele'-kuli, Demel - hetihaya, and other like allusions. Indrapala corroborates this suggestion of long-held land tenure: the element Demel in these names "obviously indicates some association with Tamils. They denote Tamil settlements in those places..."

He continues to note the implication for labor on behalf of the kingdom:

... it is not a pure coincidence that Tamil inscriptions of the eleventh century have been found not far from some of the Tamil allotments, Tamil lands and villages associated with the collection of Demala -Kuli which are mentioned in the tenth-century Sinhalese inscriptions. <sup>16</sup>

In other words, a strong conjunction of ancient evidence shows Tamil habitation and labor near the seat of Sinhalese kingship. From this, we can begin to understand just how deeply intertwined are the historical roots of the Tamil and Sinhalese populations of Sri Lanka.

The influence of Tamil on royal, religious and domestic inscriptions was not confined to those appearing within the Brahmi script. Even later Sinhalese inscriptions show the popular usage of Tamil words such as Viyal (vayal), Nel, Veli, Varian, Nattiyam, Mekappar, Parumar, Varumar, Kuli, Velan, Murandu, and Piranattu, among others. Contemporaneous South Indian inscriptions show a parallel usage of such words.

Not only do the ancient kingdoms' inscriptions reveal how much the spheres of Tamil and Sinhala intersected, but also how such intersection merged even those borders traditionally separating religion and commerce. For instance, in Anuradhapura we find a Tamil inscription of the ninth or

early tenth century which speaks of a donation made by a Tamil Nankunattar mercantile guild to a Buddhist temple called Makkothai Palli.

This inscription bears at its end the following Venba verse:

“ போதி நிழலமர்ந்த புண்ணியன்போ லெவ்வயிர்க்குந்  
தீதி லருள்சுரக்குஞ் சிந்தையா - னாதி  
வருதன்மங் குன்றாத மாதவன்மாக் கோதை  
யொருதர்ம பாலனுள்ளன்” .<sup>17</sup>

In deciphering this passage, Indrapala notes the existence of an area called Thiruvanchikkalam or Makkothai in the vicinity of the South Indian coastal town of Cochin. He also notes the Cera King Makkothai and considers that the inscription refers either to the Kerala area or to King Makkothai. This verse proves notable not only for its evidence of strong ties between Tamil and Buddhist communities, but also for being the earliest verse entirely in Tamil to be found in Sri Lanka.

Also in Anuradhapura and dating from the ninth or tenth century, but among the ancient kingdom's Hindu ruins, two Tamil inscriptions refer to donations made to Hindu temples, while a third speaks of a donation to a Murugan Temple. The names used in the first two inscriptions strongly suggest a Pallava connection. The languages of all three inscriptions, especially those relating to Hindu temples, show "the usage of grammatically pure Tamil."<sup>18</sup>

Such clean grammar can lead its examiners to understand that an ancient Tamil-speaking populace thrived in cohabitation with the ancient Sinhala-speaking population.

As well as grammar, literary forms provide clues about a culture's *in situ* level of development. The Kegalle District's Kotagama offers us a fourteenth-century Tamil verse inscription celebrating the victory of Singai Aryan, the Arya Chakaravarti of the Jaffna Kingdom.<sup>19</sup>

The verse in Tamil reads as follows:

“ உத்தமர்தங் கோயில் வலகழி எனலும்  
நித்தநியமம் நெறிவளர்  
சித்தமுடன் சீரிளமை சேர்ந்த  
பதியில் வினயாரம்ப பேரிளமையார்த்துகள்

போதா வாயிரங் கொண்டுரைப்பார் திரு  
சூத்தமாக முயன்றான் முயன்ற திரு”

Based on the above inscription, written in verses of delicately sculpted Tamil metric forms, Velupillai argues that a highly developed literary culture must have existed in the fourteenth century.<sup>20</sup> For such a tradition to develop, there must have been a long usage of the language.

If we accept this long history of settlement as a given and continue to examine the Anuradhapura ruins, we find two Tamil inscriptions in the Granta script which continue to show how much Tamil played a part in the holiest of Buddhist precincts. Dated to the ninth or tenth century, this pair of liths only recently has been located in the famous Buddhist shrine, the Jetavanaramaya<sup>21</sup> Referring to donations made to the Jetavanaramaya, the inscribed name of Narendra Ratna Jayawallabha Rayar suggests a strong Pallava connection.

Another example of this manner of intertwining can be found in the dual use of Tamil and Sinhala in the North Central Province's Dellegama Dewala inscription.<sup>22</sup>

Do not think that support for the other's religious practice was unilaterally limited to Tamil donations to Buddhist or Sinhalese kingship. Evidence of Sinhalese contributions to both Hindu and Tamil communities abounds. At the Atakada Vihare, we find a Tamil inscription, dating from the eleventh or twelfth century, which mentions Uttama Chola. This passage refers to grants made by the Sinhalese king to a Sivan temple called Uttama Chola Iswaram situated at Kadave Korale in the North Central Province.<sup>23</sup>

Similarly, a twelfth-century Tamil inscription, ascribed to Jayabahu I and found at the Amparai District's Kirindigama, refers to grants made to a Brahmin village.<sup>24</sup> A twelfth-century Tamil inscription found in Siva Devale No.3 in Padaviya refers to worship of the **Foot Mark** in Padaviya.<sup>25</sup>

The verse reads as follows:-

“தென்னிலங்கைக் கோன் பராக்கிரமபாகு நிச்சங்கமல்லற்  
கியாண்டஞ்சிற்  
தினகரன் சுறவி வணைந்தவத்தையிலுத்திரட்டாதி யேழ்பக்கம்  
பொன்னவன் தின நற்சாதயோகத்தில் ஊர்தரு போதி  
மாதவர்தம்”

பொற்பமர் கோயில் முனிவராலயந்தேனறந் திகழ் சாலையுஞ்  
செயித்தம்  
அன்னவை திகழ ஐவர்கண்டன் வனுபேரி இலங்கை அதிகாரி  
அலகுதபுயன்  
தென்பராக்கரமன் மேனைச்செனவி நாதன் திருப்பியரன்  
மன்னிய சிறப்பில் மலிதருமழகாற் பராக்கரம அதிகாரிப் பிரிவு  
வளர்தர  
அமைத்தான் ஸ்ரீபுர நகருள் மதிமான் பஞ்சரன் மகிழ்ந்தே”

Along this same path of inquiry, we find in the North Western Province's Panduwasnuwara (Kurunegala District) an inscription in Tamil ascribed to Sri Nissankamalla. Scholar K. Kanapathipillai assigns this lith to the twelfth century,<sup>26</sup> whereas K.G. Krishnan dates it to the thirteenth.<sup>27</sup>

Its text offers the following carefully crafted delineation:

“சேது,  
கங்கணம்வேற் கண்ணிணையாற் காட்டினார் காமர்வளைப்  
பங்கையக்கை மேற்றிலகம் பாரித்தார் - பொங்கொலிநீர்ச்  
சிங்கைநக ராரியனைச் சேரா வனுரேசர்  
தங்கள் மடமாதர் தாம்”.

Here we read of Nissankamalla's construction of “a Buddhist temple, a monastery for monks, an alms Hall, a Caitya, and a College called Parakrama Atikari Pirivena.” We can observe here not only a royal inscription in Tamil, not only the Sinhalese support for the Tamil, but also the democracy inherent in an even-handed list: the caitya is mentioned as equitably as the pirivenā.

Such equity continues in the significant Lankatilake inscriptions. Side by side with Sinhalese inscriptions do the Tamil inscriptions appear, having been willed into being by both King Bhvaneka Bahu IV and King Vickrema Bahu III. These Tamil inscriptions refer to grants made to both Buddhist and Hindu Temples.<sup>28</sup>

This sense of the flux and travel of cultures from ancient time onward has ample support in the interesting Galle Trilingual inscription, indited in all of Chinese, Persian and Tamil. The whole having been ordered by a fifteenth-century Chinese king, the Tamil inscription, wherein the words Tenavarai Nayanar and Tenavarai Alvar become significant, refers to donations made to a Sivan Temple and a Vishnu Temple.<sup>29</sup> Destroyed by



the Portuguese, the mentioned massive Vishnu Temple still stands, albeit in ruins, at Devinuwara, both a corroboration of the inscription and a recollection of the temple's past magnificence. Though in the same area there also stood a Sivan temple, as yet no trace of the old site has been unearthed.

Tellingly, there is no dearth of Tamil inscriptions indited by both Sinhalese and Tamil kings. *Table I* gives in brief a few of these liths which testify to the preponderant usage of the Tamil language by even the Sinhalese kings.

As Sri Lankan territory was basically fragmented, each district had its own ruling king. That Tamil inscriptions were created over the entirety of Sri Lanka conveys an important point. As kings deliver their messages in the language of their people, Tamils, at least in small concentrations, lived throughout Sri Lanka.

However, even the absence of Tamil inscriptions does not mean the absence of Tamil settlements. Consider how often the aforementioned inscriptions speak in one breath, as it were, of donations to both Buddhist and Hindu temples. This simultaneity epitomizes not only the religious and linguistic equality advocated by the kings, but also the high culture and civilized outlook sponsored by both the ancient kings and their people.

Such equitability marks the absence of hatred, a necessary cornerstone for a true and vibrant democracy, and one which we would do well to remember today.

If we continue from our investigation of inscriptional evidence to examine literary texts, we find from various literary sources that Tamil was an elective subject in Buddhist Pirivenas, and that most members of the clergy, as well as scholars and laymen, were learned in the Tamil language.

One wishing to learn more on the position of Tamil in Sri Lankan history as revealed by literary sources would do well to see the wealth of material that has been published on the subject.<sup>30</sup>

But even looking no farther than **The Mahavamsa**, we find that the fourteenth century's King Parakramabahu IV had as his tutor a monk of Chola origin. Having built a temple at Vidagama in the Raigam Korale of the Kalutara District, Parakramabahu donated the structure to this monk.<sup>31</sup>

During his lifetime, Parakramabahu's Cholian monk proved to be no mean influence. Kariyawasam makes the following observations with regard to the furtherance of Tamil influence on Sinhala literature:

It is possible that from [the Cholian monk's] time onwards Tamil assumed greater importance in this land. Tamil poems were studied in the Pirivenas. The Pali Jatakathakatha was translated into Sinhalese under the guidance of [him]. This work contains many words and even constructions of Tamil origin.<sup>32</sup>

Such influence was not limited to Parakramabahu IV. Kariyawasam goes on to note that:

... during the time of King Parakrama Bahu VI (1412-1467 AD) too the study and cultivation of Tamil received much encouragement. This King had many connections with the Tamils. His Chief Minister was a Tamil prince from Kerala, Nannurtunaiyar, who married Ulakudai Devi, his daughter. Prince Sapumal or Senbagapperumal and his younger brother, Prince of Ambulugala, adopted sons of the same King, were children born to a Sinhalese Princess married to a Tamil Prince from Cola. Prince Sapumal ascended the throne of Kotte under the title of Bhuvanekabahu VI (1468-1474 AD) and Ambulugala too reigned at Kotte, under the title of Vira Parakramabahu VIII (1484-1509 AD).

The Tamil people's intermixing was limited not only to the royal court's domestic life but extended itself to education as well. Kariyawasam observes that:

The King's chaplains during this time were Tamils again. King Parakramabahu VI's tutor and benefactor Maha Vidagama Thera, became the head of the Vidagama temple after the demise of the Cholian monk. This monk, who according to tradition was tutor to the famous Sri Rahula Sangharaja of Totagamuva Vijayaba Pirivena (another adopted son of King Parakramabahu VI) must have been a Tamil scholar, having been heir to a Tamil tradition. Both Sri Rahula Thera and Vidagama Maitreya Thera, no doubt, knew Tamil well. **Pancika Pradipaya** of Sri Rahula Thera mentions a

Tamil glossary to the Pali **Jatakathakatha**, which had been consulted by him, along with a host of other books, in the compilation of that work. Maitreya Thera's **Lovada Sangarava**, a didactic work, is said to contain several ideas identical with **Naladiyar**.

That scholarly monks were consulting Tamil sources becomes hardly a surprise when we consider the prevalence of Tamil Sandesa Kavyas (Dutu literature) or Message Poems which appeared as a popular form during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Most of these Sandesa Kavyas describe educational and religious activities, speckled with an occasional reference to the royal court.

The **Kokila Sandesa** of Irugal Kulatila Pirivena Thera proves interesting on many accounts. First, it refers to the study of Tamil at the Buddhist Paiyagala Pirivena:

වයිසා කරන තත් - දෙමළ කවිවර රඳනා  
පයිසාගල වෙහෙර - මුනිඳු දැක නැමද යව සනොසින්

Later, **Kokila Sandesa** refers to Parakrama Bahu VI's royal court in which shone luminary poets laureate and scholars versed in all of Elu (Sinhala), Tamil, Pali and Sanskrit:

සොඳ එළි දෙමළ මාගද සකු බස පසිඳු  
සෙඳ මියුරසින් නොසැකෙව් කිවියෙති පුරුඳු  
ඔඳ ගුණ ගිහිණි නම් කළයුතු මහ කිවිඳු  
වැඳ වැඳ කියති නොමඳ ව කවි බැඳ විරිඳු

Another Message Poem, the **Gira Sandesa** of Sri Rahula, refers to the monastic study of Sinhala, Tamil, Pali and Sanskrit, Pali, in various classes held in Galle's Tottagamuwa Vijayaba Pirivena:

සිරිමත් සොඳුරු එ වෙහෙර තැන තැන ලකුළු  
ඉදැසින් ලෙසට පෙර කිවියර සිරි රුකුළු  
දැනැගත් සඳ ලකර විසරණ විසත් මුළු  
පවසන් සකු මගද එළි දෙමළ කවි නළු

Similarly, the **Savul Sandesa** refers to the presence of poets laureate in Rajasingha I's royal court. These poets were likewise versed in Elu, Tamil, Pali and Sanskrit:

ගැඹුරු සකු මගද - හෙළි දෙමළෙහ පුරුඳු  
සොඳුරු සඳ ලකර - විසරණ දත් කිවිඳු  
මියුරු අරුත් යොදමින් කවි බැඳ විරුඳු  
අතුරු නොව කියති - සබතුරෙහි නර නිඳු

These Message Poems prove fascinating not only for their detailing of the representative usage of languages but also for describing shared sites of religious awe. For instance, the Paravi Message Poem refers to a Kali Kovil in Bentota where both Sinhalese and Tamils worshipped.

රත් තැටි අයුරු තුඟු පින් පියොවුරු උදු ල  
මත් අටි කරන අගනන් රගදෙන ඉපි ල  
උන් සැටි බලා සිටි සලෙචන් නොපෑ ඇ ල  
බෙන් කොටි නෙතර සැනපෙව කාලි කෝටි ල

Such blending becomes more apparent when we read the **Selalihini Sandesa** of Sri Rahula which refers to the Sivan Temple situated quite near the Royal Court of Sri Jayewardhanapura Kotte (of the Kingdom of Kotte):

කළු වැල් කපුරු දුම්බකුළු ලෙලෙන දදපෙ ල  
සුවිසල් මිහිගු සක්සත් මිණි හඬ වහ ල  
කරලොල් සතන් පවසන තියුගි දෙම ල  
මනකල් ඉසුරු කෝටිලු ලගිනේ ලක ල

The passage reads:

Rest thou in the beautiful **Devala** where, amidst fumes of camphor and black aloe - wood, rows of banners are waving, where the din of Tamil drums, conchs and ringing and tinkling bells is spread far and wide, and where eulogistic hymns are chanted by Tamil maidens so as to attract every one.

The words of the passage ring especially true when we consider the temples prevalent along Sri Lanka's western and southern coasts. These abundant temples for Siva, Vishnu, Murugan (Skanda), Ganesa and other deities formed sites for both Tamils and Sinhalese to worship. As we observed earlier, from both epigraphic and literary evidence we know that there lived Tamil Buddhists and bhikkus.

The function of Tamil as a language which could be used to detail fundamentals of belief seems clear when we note that King Parakrama Bahu

IV of Dambadeniya (also known as Pandita Parakramabahu) ordered even such a basic cornerstone of royal cosmology as a treatise on astrology, the **Caracotimalai**, to be written in Tamil.

We have considered literary sources which evince the habits of shared belief, study, and worship among Tamil and Sinhalese. If we focus our question into one which examines how sheerly linguistic modes were shared, we find the great legacy by which Tamil has enriched Sinhala both in grammar and literature.

In his appraisal of this legacy, Godakumbure says:

Dravidian languages have, however, had [an] influence on Sinhalese chiefly through contact, and Tamil being the language spoken by a larger population in the neighbouring part of India,[it] asserted a wide influence on the vocabulary, grammar, and literature of the Sinhalese.

He goes on to note that the “people of Ceylon”, believing Tamil culture to be superior, took on habits which conflated their very identity with that of the Tamils. Not only did they adopt Tamil names, but they wrote something as crucial to their identity as their individual signatures in the Tamil script.

Returning to a solely linguistic appraisal, Godakumbure traces the Tamil influence upon not only the structure of the Sinhalese language, but also upon its grammatical terminology:

In the oldest existing Sinhalese grammar, the **Sidat Sangarawa** (thirteenth century), which for the most part adopts the methods and phraseology of the Sanskrit grammarians, there are certain passages which clearly display its indebtedness to Tamil.<sup>33</sup>

Godakumbure also gives a list of works which have been either translated or adapted from Tamil sources.<sup>34</sup> Though the **Mahabharata** is a work in Sanskrit, a language which considerably influenced Sinhala literature, it was only in the seventeenth century that a Buddhist priest from Kandy District’s Kobbekaduwa produced the **Mahabharata** from a Tamil source as a Jataka story. This work of 1514 stanzas, entitled **Maha Padaranga Jatakaya** was edited by D.R.Seneviratne and published in 1929.

In addition to the **Mahabharata**, some of the other works produced from Tamil sources include **Vetalam Katava**, **Ramayanaya**, **Vallimata Katava**, **Pattini Halla**, **Valalu Katava**, **Dinatara Katava**, **Sinnamuttu Katava**, **Kancimale Sulambavati Katava**, **Atulla Katava**, **Ravana Hella**, **Vayanti Male**, **Vitti hata**, and **Hariccandara Katava**.

Among them, the first two chapters of **Kamba Ramayanam** in Tamil was translated into Sinhalese by J.V.Abhayagunawardhana in 1841, to be revised and published by C.D.Bastian in 1886. **Vallimata Katava** was written by Mudlr.A.Vijayasundara of Matara in 1772. **Pattini Halla** and **Vayantimale** relate to **Cilappatikaram**, while **Vayanti male** was written by **Tisimhala Kavtilaka** of Vidagama in Kalutara. **Hariccandara** was written by a poet from Dodanvala who also went by the name of **Doddanvala Kirindu**. From this list, we see that as much as the Kandyan area played an important role in preserving and producing works of literary worth, during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the South played an equally important role in enlightening the populace to the value of knowledge drawn from Tamil sources.

If we return to the sixteenth century, we see the extent to which Tamil was respected as a language of culture and learning. Alagiawanna Mukavetti, the author of **Subashithaya**, says:

I shall interpret the great laws of conduct which have come to us from the mouths of the sages of old and which have been embodied in the books, and state their substance in Sinhalese rhymes for the benefit of the ignorant who have not studied Tamil, Sanskrit and Pali.

පහළ පොරණ ඉසිවර මුට්ති	මනනද
දෙමළ සකු මගද නොහසළ සතට	දද
පුවල නිති සත ගත පද අරුත්	ලෙද
සිහළ බසින් සැකෙවින් කියමි පද	බැද

Though Mukawetti was bold in delineating the territory of sophistication, this same valuation of Tamil recurs on a more subtle level if we observe in what exalted company Tamil appeared. The **Kav Silumina**, considered the foremost Sinhala poem of the twelfth century, has in canto six, stanza fourty-eight, the word **melap** which means “canopy” in Tamil. Because the Sinhalese word **viyan** was also in use at that time, the Venerable Valivittiye Sorata Nayaka Thera, one time Vice-Chancellor of the Vidyodaya University who in 1946 edited this great poem, explains:

[that] **Melap** is from the Tamil word (மேலாட்டி ). The fact that this word has been used here in preference to the very well known word **Viyan**, shows that even during the time of the composition of this poem, there was many a bond between Sinhalese and the Tamils even in the Courts of Kings.

(\*that this quote appears on page 122 of the Thera's work should appear in the footnote)<sup>35</sup>

Even the highly resonant Kandyan Convention of 1815 was signed in Tamil by some Kandyan chiefs. As the learned Venerable Valivitiye Sorata Thera has aptly put it, "there was many a bond between Sinhalese and Tamils even in the Courts of Kings" in the pre - colonial period of this country.

As we noted before, the strength of this bond transcended the pettiness of contemporary communalist hatreds, absent during the pre-colonial period. Clergy, kings, court officials and laypeople alike were highly cultured and faithful enough to follow the core teachings of their respective religions.

We might close our retrospective of pre-colonial Tamil to note that this absence of hatred, as documented in linguistic sources, led to the emergence of the popular Sinhalese nursery rhyme, which, in translation to the cumbrous rhthymms of English, reads:

Child: Mummy, Mummy! To Galle I go!	අම්මේ අම්මේ ගාලු යන්න
Mother: Why Sonna, to Galle?	මොටද පුනේ ගාලු යන්නේ
Child: To study two languages.	බාසා දෙකක් ඉගෙන ගන්න
Mother: What languages?	මොන බසද ඉගෙන ගන්නේ
Child: Tamil and Sinhalese.	ආන්දරා සේන්දරා

## NOTES

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- 13 Pushparatnam, P., "Recent Discoveries of Epigraphs with VEI and Eelam in Jaffna Region" - Paper submitted to the Thanjavur Symposium - FEB. 2 - 4, 1991 - Unpublished - (vide f.8).
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- 15 Wickremasinghe, D.M. de Z, "Slab Inscription at Mihintale," **Epigraphia Zeylanica**, Vol.I, pp.90, 97, 113.
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Varam Siri ghananandam - parivena samayutam  
Viharam Karayitvana - subodhi patimagharam  
Attano garu Coliya - Maha theressa dapay.

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**ANNEXURE 1  
A LIST OF SOME TAMIL INSCRIPTIONS INDITED BY SINHALESE AND TAMIL KINGS**

Serial No.	Period	Name of King	Place where indited	Province or District	Contents of the inscription	Source
1	11th CAD	Rajendra I (Chola King)	Kays	Jaffna originally	Incomplete - as only a portion is available 2	Cintanai Vol. 2 No. 4
2	12th CAD	Gajabahu II	Jaffna	Matola, Mannar	Inscriptions	CTI - Pt I
3	12th CAD	Jayabahu I	Hingurakgoda	N C P	Grants to a Buddhist Temple - Grantha script	CTI - Pt I
4	12th CAD	Jayabahu I	Budumuttawa	N W P	Grants to a Hindu Temple	CTI - Pt 2
5	12th CAD	Vijayabahu I	Kantalai	Trinco Dt.	Grants to Sivan Temple Vijayarajeswaram	CTI - Pt 2
6	12th CAD	Gajabahu II	Kantalai	Trinco Dt.	Grants to a Brahmin Village (2 inscriptions)	CTI - Pt 2
7	12th CAD	Rajaraja I	Matola	Mannar Dt.	Grants to Rajarajeswaram (Tiruketiswaram renovated)	UCRXX
8	12th CAD	Gajabahu II	Mankanal	Trinco Dt.	Grants to head of Palanquin bearers	UCRXXVIII
9	12th CAD	Jayabahu I	Moragahawela	Tamankaduwa NPC	Grants to a Buddhist temple - Tamil & Grantha script	-do-
10	12th CAD	Parakrama Bahu I	Ninativu	Jaffna	Re-arrangements at the Kays Port - marine trade	CTI - Pt I
11	14th CAD	Vijayabahu V. VI	Tirukkivil	East Prov.	Grants to a Sivan Temple	CTI - Pt II
12	14th CAD	Parakrama Bahu III	Naimmana	Matara	Grants to a Brahmin Village	CTI - Pt I
13	15th CAD	Parakrama Bahu II	Munneswaram	N. W. Prov.	Grants to the Sivan Temple at Munneswaram	Cintanai Vol. 2 Jul/Oct.
14	15th CAD	Parakrama Bahu VI	Main St. Jaffna	Jaffna	Incomplete	CTI - Pt I
15	16th CAD	Vijaya Bahu VII	Tirukovil	East. Prov.	Grants to a Murugan Temple	Cintanai Vol. II Jul/Oct.
16	16th CAD	Vijaya Bahu VI	Thambilluvil	-do-	Grants of land to a Hindu temple	Cintanai Vol. 2 Jul/Oct.
17	17th CAD	Tirukkivil	Tirukkivil	-do-	Grants to a Murugan Temple	-do-
18	17th CAD	Vijayabahu VI	Tirukkivil	-do-	Copper Plates. Visit of Chetties from Madurai with an idol of Ganesha and a Royal Princess	-do-
		Senaraz alias	Veeramani	-do-	Idol of Ganesha and a Royal Princess	-do-
		Bhuvanasinga Sami	Sammanthurai	-do-	Copper Plates - Grants to a Brahmin called Ramanathan	-do-
		Rajasinghe II	Sammanthurai	-do-	Copper Plates - Grants to a Brahmin called Ramanathan	-do-

## CHAPTER II

### THE POSITION OF TAMIL UNDER COLONIAL RULE

As the country at the time of subjugation existed as the distinct kingdoms of Kandy, Kotte, and Jaffna, the Portuguese and Dutch continued to administer the country as three separate units.

When the British took possession of the country from the Dutch, they also maintained this distinction of three units until 1833 when, under the recommendations of the Colebrooke Commission, the country was brought under a unified system of administration.

While the three colonizing powers all used their own respective languages for official purposes, there exists no evidence to indicate that the colonizers, despite any of their other sins, discriminated between Sri Lanka's two indigenous languages, Sinhalese and Tamil. Documents speak instead of the freedom with which, when permitted, people could communicate with the government in either of the two indigenous languages. Following the example of the ancient kings who had messages inscribed in the language of the people, governmental orders were conveyed to the people in their two languages.

Evidence that the British Government used the two indigenous languages for communicating laws, by-laws, orders and notices abounds. At least until a sufficient sector conversant in English had been educated by English school curricula, the Government Gazette was published in English, Sinhalese and Tamil.

To observe the equitable regard in which the languages were held, we might examine the following specimens, covering a span of five years: Government Gazette No.1,445, of the 20th of December, 1878; No.1,705, dated the 14th of December, 1883; and No.1637 of the 10th of September, 1883.

In the first we notice a Tamil translation of the By-laws of the Matara Sanitary Board. Another Tamil notice regards the sale of land in Anuradhapura.

The second Gazette mentions one W.J.Mendis of Madampe who publicizes his appointment as a Sinhala language notary Sinhala in the Katugampola Korale of Kurunegala District. This notice proves interesting: although Mendis has been appointed a Sinhala notary in a predominantly Sinhalese District, he has given notice in Tamil as well.

The third Gazette contains notices from the Kachcheris of Galle and Matale regarding claims to land. These show that Tamil as well as Sinhala was used throughout the country. (Cf. appendices 1,2 and 3).

Beyond the prevalence of Tamil throughout Ceylon, the government actively encouraged region-specific linguistic representation. In 1904, one Mr.Taldena was occupying the post of Ratamahatmaya in the Panama Pattu of the Eastern Province. During the year, the Government Agent for the Eastern Province, Mr. E.F. Hopkins, paid a visit to the province and found the area's people to be Tamil speakers. He also found that the Ratamahatmaya, Mr.Taldena, proved unable to perform his duties in Tamil: neither could he converse with the area people nor could he maintain records in Tamil. Although Hopkins, the Government Agent, gave Mr.Taldena several chances to study Tamil, the Agent's efforts were of no avail. Finally, the Government Agent served a charge-sheet upon the Ratamahatmaya which called upon Taldena to give reason why his services should not be terminated for not being able to discharge his duties in Tamil, the language of his area's people.

As a merciful alternative to dismissal, permission was granted to Mr.Taldena to retire quietly. Commenting on this, E.F.Hopkins, Eastern Province's Government Agent observed that:

..... .In January, two important native appointments were made. Mr.Gilbert Canagasabai was appointed Vanniah of Panama Pattu in succession to the Ratamahatmaya, who was permitted to retire. This division is now almost entirely Tamil, and its administration by a Sinhalese Ratamahatmaya was unsatisfactory.<sup>1</sup>

During the British regime, even justice's administration employed Tamil. Summons were served in Tamil to Tamil-speaking witnesses:

There will be total miscarriage of justice if parties to a case are not given the opportunity to testify in their own language. Even summons which contains [sic] intimation of the case should be in the language of the parties concerned.<sup>2</sup>

That Tamil was also used for judicial purposes speaks for the general trend under colonial rule: despite colonialism's manifold miscreancies, it perpetrated no discrimination in usage between the two indigenous languages, Sinhala and Tamil. Not only did Tamil enjoy the same status as Sinhala, but its official usage along with Sinhala was strongly recommended, as we shall see when we investigate legislative rulings.

NOTES

- 1 Hopkins, E.F., Administration Report for 1905 - Eastern Province, p.1
- 2 File on Notary A.S.Warnakulasingham (Lot EP 6/13695 - 01869 - Dept. of National Archives).

APPENDIX I

இலங்கை அரசாங்கத்தின் அறிவுறுத்தல்கள். - தி. 1, 115. மாற்றியமைப்பு 20, 1875.

1905

இதன்மீது கவனப்படுத்தி உரிமையாளர்களை, மாதிரியாகப் பட்டணத்து ஸ்தலத்திலிருந்து செல்லும் கந்தகாரன் உண்டாவதற்குப் பிறகு மாதிரியாகப் பட்டணத்து ஸ்தலத்திலிருந்து செல்லும் கந்தகாரன் உண்டாவதற்குப் பிறகு மாதிரியாகப் பட்டணத்து ஸ்தலத்திலிருந்து செல்லும் கந்தகாரன் உண்டாவதற்குப் பிறகு...

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## CHAPTER III

### SINHALA AND TAMIL AS OFFICIAL LANGUAGE

As prelude to representative governance and participatory democracy, the British introduced the Legislative Council, an innovation soon followed by the State Council. As advisory council to the Governor, the Legislative Council was constituted of both official and unofficial members, whereas the State Council proved to be a more democratic body in which members, most of whom were elected by universal franchise, could express their views freely. Following the overall modus operandi for the country's administration, the business of the State Council was conducted in English.

The first move to make Sinhalese and Tamil the official languages of the country came from a steadfast statesman, Mr. G.K.W.Perera, Matara's State Council Member. On the fifth of July, 1932, he gave notice of the following motion in the State Council:

This Council resolves -

- (1) that no person shall in future be appointed into the Civil or Clerical Service who fails to reach a high standard in Sinhalese or Tamil.
- (2) that no officer in the Civil or Clerical Service shall receive promotion until and unless he showed proficiency in Sinhalese or Tamil.
- (3) that no person shall be appointed as Police Magistrate to preside in the higher Criminal Courts unless he proved his ability to conduct and record proceedings in Sinhalese and Tamil.
- (4) that lawyers be permitted to conduct criminal trials in Sinhalese and Tamil. <sup>1</sup>

However, as the Council was dissolved in 1935, this motion toward equitable use of the indigenous languages lapsed and no debate took place.

Eleven years later, on June 22, 1943, Mr.J.R.Jayewardene gave a different expression to this notion of the worth of indigenous language usage, first hazarded by Perera, in the following motion in the State Council:

That with the object of making Sinhalese the official language of Ceylon within a reasonable number of years this Council is of opinion [sic] -

- (a) that Sinhalaese should be made the medium of instruction in all schools;
- (b) that Sinhalese should be made a compulsory subject in all public examinations;
- (c) that legislation should be introduced to permit the business of the State Council to be conducted in Sinhalese also;
- (d) that a Commission should be appointed to choose for translation and to translate important books of other languages into Sinhalese;
- (e) that a Commission should be appointed to report on all steps that need to be taken to effect the translation from English into Sinhalese.<sup>2</sup>

When his Sinhalese-favoring motion was taken up in debate on May 24, 1944, Jayawardene explained his motivation for an emphasis on a single indigenous language:

...the official language is English, and that is why this country is always in danger of being governed by a small coterie who go through those English schools, whereas the vast majority who go through the Sinhala and Tamil schools must always be in the position of hewers of wood and drawers of water. ....

He underlines here the power wreaked by a language being termed "official". More pertinently, however, on this same day of debate, Jayawardene issues an emendation to his earlier emphasis upon Sinhalese:

...I wish to speak a word of explanation with regard to my desire to include Tamil also. I had always the intention that Tamil should be spoken in the Tamil-speaking Provinces, and

that Tamil should be the official language in the Tamil-speaking Provinces.

We might note that Tamil begins to have an “also” status here: it begins to possess the quality of an afterthought, as though it were a small rider attendant upon the passage of Sinhala as an official language. Both above and below, we can see Jayawardene struggling with the basic principles of equitable representation, with its initial criterion of statistical power:

...as two-thirds of the people of this country speak Sinhalese, I had the intention of proposing that only Sinhalese should be the official language of the Island; but it seems to me that the Tamil community and also the Muslim community, who speak Tamil, wish that Tamil also should be included on equal terms with Sinhalese.

The self-contradictions entailed in this majoritarian concept of democracy will produce what later language rights proponents will call a tyranny by numbers, one which effectively quiets the voices of entire electorates.

In Jayawardene’s case, he argues that one “great fear” arises, ostensibly related to cultural preservation: as only three million people in the world speak Sinhalese, he continues, the language would suffer or be “entirely lost in the time to come” were Tamil to be placed on “equal footing” with it in Sri Lanka.

He continues by emphasizing the strong influence within Sri Lanka of Tamil culture, films, and a literature “used by over forty million.” Initially Jayawardene considered such influence “detrimental to the future of the Sinhalese language,” yet he still wishes to appear to include the Tamil-speaking community:

...if it is the desire of the Tamils that Tamil also should be given an equal status with Sinhalese, I do not think we should bar it from attaining that position. This House, I am sure, will vote with me that English should be deposed, from its position as the official language of the country and Sinhalese and Tamil, the ancient languages of our people should be made the official languages of Lanka. <sup>3</sup>

Jayawardene’s conclusion before the State Council was that a democracy must represent the voices of its people. Mr.V.Nalliah, Member for

Trincomalee - Batticaloa, moved an amendment to the motion to make Sinhalese and Tamil the official languages of the country.<sup>4</sup> Mr.R.S.S.Gunawardena, Member for Gampola, having seconded the amendment, added the need for official legitimacy accorded to a heterogenous population’s languages:

...It is impossible, in the nature of things, that one language should be made the official language. The moment Sinhalese is suggested as a subject, all the other Tamil-speaking good people would, probably legitimately, feel that their language has been relegated to the background and that their interests have been relegated to the background and that their interests have been neglected. But so long as we find two sections of the community speaking two languages, it is necessary that both languages should be recognised as official languages. That would be a solution of our difficulties.<sup>5</sup>

In a suffusion of similar sentiment, Mr. T.B. Jayah, a nominated Member, ended by marking the coincidence of pre-colonial nationalism, of “those who have a love for this country,” with an indigenous dual-language policy:

I do not see any reason why, in a country like this, where the large majority of the people are Sinhalese and Tamils these two languages should be relegated to the background. ... I think it is but right that those who have a love for this country should insist on making Sinhalese and Tamil also official languages. <sup>6</sup>

Jayah’s expression of crowd-galvanizing patriotism may have spurred the then-Member for Point Pedro, Mr. G.G. Ponnambalam, to examine more closely the problems resulting from monocultural definitions of patriotism. Ponnambalam chose to cite the all-too-real and contemporaneous horrors of World War II:

Some time ago, even the Leader of the State Council was unwitting enough to deliver himself of this function: that he looks forward to a time where there will be one official language, one race, and one religion...It is that which we must bitterly oppose when a whole world war is being fought to kill this canard of a superior race, or a Herrenvolk in Europe. We do not want a “Herrenvolk” in Ceylon and the language of the

“Herrenvolk” to be imposed upon the other sections of the people of this country. That is the position. That is why we opposed this [Sinhala-only] motion.<sup>7</sup>

Mr.S.W.R.D.Bandaranaike added that, in considering the Tamil-Sinhala amendment to Jayawardene’s original motion, he had “no personal objection to both these languages being considered official languages,” nor did he see any “particular harm or danger or real difficulty arising out of [the amendment.]”<sup>8</sup> Later, he would continue this non-committal tone in his abstention from voting on the Tamil-Sinhala amendment.

Before this, however, Jayawardene had conceded the amendment. He added that if one investigated statistical reports, in “two out of the nine provinces in this country, in the north and east, over ninety percent speak Tamil.” He continued to declare the case for enfranchisement of Tamil-speaking populations: “we must not refuse the people in those Provinces Tamil as an official language.”<sup>9</sup>

Following Jayawardene’s concession, in an ironic repetition of numbers, the amendment supporting both Tamil and Sinhalese as the country’s official languages was carried by a two-thirds majority, with Bandaranaike’s abstention a hovering reminder of the difficulty the issue posed to Council members.

In pursuance of this dual-language decision by the State Council the acting leader moved:

That -

- (a) A select Committee of the State Council be appointed to consider and report on the steps necessary to effect the transition from English to Sinhalese and Tamil with the object of making Sinhalese and Tamil the official languages of the country.
- (b) The Committee to consist of -
  - (1) The Legal Secretary
  - (2) The Hon. C.W.W.Kannangara
  - (3) Mr.T.B.Jayah

- (4) Mr.J.R.Jayewardene
- (5) Mr.S.Natesan
- (6) Mr.A.Ratnayake

Having elected Jayewardene Chairman, the Committee set out to gather information both by holding public sittings in Colombo and other districts and by entertaining written submissions.<sup>10</sup> Once it had finalised its report, the Jayewardene Committee issued its findings, as Sessional Paper No.XXII of 1946 on the seventeenth of December, 1946.<sup>11</sup>

The population statistics which the Committee furnished are as follows:

Race	Population to the nearest 1000	Percentage to total population
Sinhalese (Low country and Kandyan)	4,637,000	69.6
Ceylon Tamils	826,000	12.4
Ceylon Moors & Malays	393,000	5.9
Indian Tamils	682,000	10.3
Other Indians including Indian Moors	69,000	1.0
Other Races	12,000	0.8

Considering these 1946 statistics, the Committee noted:

The proportion according to language may therefore be reckoned as 69.6% Sinhalese - speaking, 28.6% Tamil-speaking.

In what we can see now as a retroactively ironic date, given the 1956 events unforeseeable by the 1946 Committee, the Committee appointed January 1, 1957, as the deadline for the transfer to Sinhala and Tamil as Ceylon’s official languages.<sup>12</sup> Committee members also recommended a progress review by a Commission in 1951.<sup>13</sup> Most pragmatically, perhaps, implementation would depend on a single recommendation : the training of Sinhala and Tamil stenographers and typists and the need to order at least two thousand Sinhalese and Tamil typewriters.<sup>14,15</sup>

Perhaps the most well-meaning plans suffer the vagaries of the political process. The State Council system was summarily dissolved in view of the

proposed parliamentary system, for which elections would be held at the end of 1947. Hence, in a preview of obstacles to come, it proved impossible to debate the 1946 Committee's well-intentioned report.

On the fourth of February, 1948, Ceylon gained independence and the country entered a new era. In 1954 Sir John Kotelawela, then Prime Minister, paid an official visit to Jaffna. At a reception accorded to him at Kokuvil Hindu College, Kotelawela promised to confirm both Sinhala and Tamil as Ceylon's official languages.

Yet upon his return to Colombo, Kotelawela was pressurized to deny his Jaffna statement, an unfortunate force to which he even more unfortunately conceded. At this juncture, an understandable misgiving began to mar the hopes of Tamil-speaking people: given political backtracking, what could the future hold for the official use of Tamil language within Sri Lanka?

Having recognized the uncertain turn taken by Kotelawela, by the nineteenth of October, 1955, Dr. N.M. Perera, a Member of Parliament (MP) for Ruwanwella, had proposed the following private member's motion:

That in the opinion of this House, the Ceylon (Constitution) Order in Council should be amended forthwith to provide for the Sinhalese and Tamil languages to be state languages of Ceylon with parity of status throughout the Island. <sup>16</sup>

Perera here forwarded a vision of unity in diversity, and the need to work toward such a vision. He underlined a parliamentary consensus of a nation united, "notwithstanding the diverse cultures we have...the diversities of languages. Notwithstanding, maybe, the traditions we have had."

Foreseeing the risks of effectively disenfranchising a sizable sector, Perera held before the assembled parliamentarians an unignorable electoral carrot:

...I feel that it is only by assuring the minorities of that equality of status that we can cultivate their goodwill and get them to work in unity for developing this country — the late Right Honorable D.S.Senayake said that our essential task was to create a nation and build up our people not with one language but with two or perhaps three.

Here we might notice Perera's use of the phrase "our people", a concept well-reconciled with his proposed "two or perhaps three" languages. According to Perera, diverse equality could be maintained.

But a government thus composed should understand the rights which equality entails. "What parity of status means," explained Perera, "is a recognition of a right that each individual has to be governed in the language he understands." That the government itself should speak to the populations it serves in the vernacular language proved a key element toward legitimizing such a language's status.<sup>17</sup>

Perera went further to explain that democracy should depend less upon absolute statistical yardsticks and more upon an abiding situational fairness and ethics.

"The test of a democratic decision," said Perera:

...is the morality of the law. It is not merely a counting of heads, but whether, in point of fact, the minorities are given a full consideration of their points of view. It means giving full weight to the right of the minority communities. That is what democracy means.<sup>18,19</sup>

Apparently Perera's definitions were strong enough to convince Mr. Edmund Samarakkody, MP for Dehiowita, to second the Tamil-Sinhala motion and speak in its support.<sup>20</sup> From a vastly different perspective, S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike fully opposed the motion and went so far as to issue an amendment to delete Tamil, thereby keeping Sinhala only as an official language.<sup>21</sup>

The House Speaker then read a version amended toward Bandaranaike's ideas. Bandaranaike having accepted this amendment,<sup>22</sup> Mr. W. Dahanayake, Galle MP, seconded this constriction toward a Sinhala-Only policy.<sup>23</sup>

Having been initiated as a private member's motion, the debate was adjourned. Yet as the political process took its blind toll, the motion was not implemented. Since Parliament itself was soon after dissolved, the motion, amended to Bandaranaike's preference, also lapsed. No further debate could take place.

What we can see from the nature of the four governmental debates of 1932, 1944, 1946, and finally 1955 is that a certain consistency reigns in the domain of issues discussed. At each juncture, those politicians concerned raised the question of whether a nation in formation could draw both conceptual and legal boundaries around the vision of a pluralistic and equally enfranchised society. At each juncture, the special subdivision of xenophobia that should rightfully not be called fear of the stranger but of one's *neighbor* recurred regarding the loss of some aspect of one culture or another within a heterogeneous milieu. At each juncture, the spectre of a nation which actively disbarred a large member of civil society from equal participation arose.

These issues would not disappear in debates thereafter. Rather, they would either migrate into the subliminal debates carried out by leading politicians or else be reincarnated into nearly unrecognizable mutations, led by a parade of more politically acceptable concepts and blandishments.

Yet all the while, pulsing underneath, core questions remained: what responsibility and human rights are at stake in a democracy's representation of its citizens' languages? What form and vehicle would best implement such responsibility? How should a democracy founded within a multilingual society best proceed in terms of its official language policy?

#### NOTES

- 1 Hansard, State Council, 5th July 1932, p.1641.
- 2 Hansard, State Council, 22nd June 1943, p.1024.
- 3 Hansard, State Council, 24th May 1944, pp.747 - 748.
- 4 Ibid, p.759
- 5 Ibid, p.760
- 6 Ibid, p.762
- 7 Ibid, p.765
- 8 Ibid, p.811
- 9 Ibid, p.813

- 10 Minutes of the State Council of Ceylon, 20th September, 1945 - Item 29, p.42
- 11 Sessional Paper NO.XXII of 1946, p.9
- 12 Ibid, p.9, para 20.
- 13 Ibid - p.27
- 14 Ibid
- 15 Ibid, p.9, para 20.
- 16 Parliament of Ceylon, Hansard, Vol.23, Cols. 572/573
- 17 Ibid, Cols. 610/611
- 18 IBid - Columns 612/613
- 19 Ibid, p.577
- 20 Ibid, Col.626
- 21 Ibid, - Col. 684/685
- 22 Ibid, Col.686
- 23 Ibid, Col.688

## CHAPTER IV

### SINHALA ONLY AS OFFICIAL LANGUAGE

As the 1956 General Elections drew near, the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) formed an electoral alliance with several other opposition parties, banded together under a common front named Mahajana Eksath Peramuna. The SLFP was led by the late Mr. S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike who had cut his ties with the United National Party (UNP). He declared that were he returned to power, within twenty-four hours he would register Sinhala as the single official language of Sri Lanka.

Agitated by Bandaranaike's election promise, the UNP also entered the Sinhala-Only race. Though both the SLFP and the UNP claimed to represent mainstream politics; both were prepared to sacrifice minority interests and rights at the seductive altar of power.

Such sacrifice did not come without protest. During the Parliament of 1952 through 1956, one long-standing member of the UNP, the Member for Kankasanturai was the late Mr. Suppiah Natesan, a world-famous and distinguished scholar who had entered politics in the interest of helping form a united nation. When the United National Party geared itself to enter the Sinhala-Only race, thereby dismantling its very foundation, Natesan resigned from his Ministerial Portfolio of Posts and Information and from the Party that had helped launch him.

On the twentieth of January, 1956, Natesan tendered his resignation. In a heartrending appeal, he expressed his disappointment with the UNP's decision to make Sinhala the singular official language. Regarding independence, he said that the Tamils "did not bargain that with the cessation of foreign rule there would be an imposition of another language on them in place of English." <sup>1</sup> He accurately identified that the Tamil language had been relegated to the margins of the country's political scheme.

To sit by passively would be to sit in error:

No self-respecting Tamil can allow this...ancient language of great cultural distinction to be reduced to an inferior position in this country.

Here Natesan conflates self-identity with national direction. Having shared breath with Sinhala-speaking communities during nation-state formation, the Tamil-speaking population possessed unarguable identity with the nation. Natesan cites the extensive contributions, both ancient and recent, made by Tamils to the formation of then-Ceylon. "Some of our Tamil leaders fought valiantly, more for their Sinhalese brethren than for their own kith and kin," he says, singling out those leaders who had fought for the country's Independence:

[These leaders] are honoured names - honoured by the Sinhalese people no less than the Tamil people. Could you, Mr. Speaker, imagine that Ramanathan and his brother Arunachalam, when they fought for freedom of Ceylon, would have even thought that the time would come when the language which they spoke, the language of which they were masters, the language of which they were proud, would be relegated to an inferior position in this country?

Consider momentarily this idea of *mastering* a language. Cofounders of Ceylon's emerging, if fluctuating, sense of modern nationhood were to be, as it were, disbarred from their own legacy of mastery. Such barricading proves impossible, Natesan continues, as the Tamil language itself cannot be extricated from the country's history.

"History shows," says Natesan:

...that the Tamil language has enjoyed an important position in this country not only in the areas where Tamil had an undisputed sway but in other areas which could be called normally Sinhalese areas.

Citing ancient markers such as the aforementioned Lankatilake Vihare and the Gadaladeniya Vihare, wherein Tamil inscriptions relating to land grants to temples neighbor parallel inscriptions in Sinhalese, Natesan exclaims that "the kings of old, the generous Sinhalese people, thought that an important place should be accorded to Tamil."

Similarly, Natesan mentions the indisputable: when such an influential document in the nation's self-identity as the Kandyan Convention was signed, both Sinhalese and Tamil names filled the roster.

Having established the two languages' historical intertwining, Natesan refers to the unfairness resulting from a blind obedience to sheerly statistical definitions of democracy: "Democracy does not mean the imposition of majority tyranny. It always stands for justice to the minorities."

Yet Natesan does not will a justice achieved by any means. He indicates that he speaks not in a "spirit of militancy":

I am not asking the Tamil people to depart from their traditions of moderation but I cannot help saying that if there is to be an imposition of a language on us against our will, resist we must; and resist we will. We will carry on the struggle on the best approved moral lines of resistance.

Following Natesan's *cri de coeur*, during the General Elections, the "moral line of resistance" which most clearly suggested itself to a North-Eastern Tamil-speaking electorate shaken by the UNP's chauvinist trends was to vote the Federal Party to power. In other districts, Tamil-speaking voters formed large blocs to support the left-inclined parties.

Still, election results showed beachmarks of the chauvinistic wave which had stormed the country. While the whipped UNP survived with a straggling eight Members of Parliament, the Mahajana Eksath Peramuna (Peoples' United Front) had been deposited into power.

Further, backed by the SLFP, S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike had been elected Prime Minister. In his early days, on the fifth of June, 1956, still seeking to restrict Ceylon's languages to Sinhala, Bandaranaike introduced:<sup>2</sup>

A Bill to prescribe the Sinhala language as the one official language of Ceylon and to enable transitory provisions to be made.

The Bill was worded as follows:

The Sinhala language shall be the one Official Language of Ceylon.

Provided that where the Minister considers it impracticable to commence the use of only the Sinhalese language for any official purpose immediately on the coming into force of this Act, the language or languages hitherto used for that purpose may be continued to be so used until the necessary change is effected as early as possible before the expiry of the 31st day of December 1960.

During the Parliamentary debate on this Bill, the pleas of both Tamil-speaking leaders and Sinhalese leaders committed to equal representation failed to sway the government's stand. In utter disappointment at the debate's conclusion, the late Dr. Colvin R. de Silva, MP for Wellawatte-Galkissa, cautioned the Government that disunity would leave the nation prey for exploitation:

Parity, Mr. Speaker, we believe is the road to the freedom of our nation and the unity of its components. Otherwise two torn little bleeding States may yet arise of one little State, which has compelled a large section of itself to treason, ready for the imperialists to mop up that which imperialism only recently disgorged.<sup>3</sup>

The tenderness of Ceylon's recent independence would highlight contradictions in its self-conceptualization. Such contradictions would complicate the requirements for amicable discourse among those so recently liberated.

Moreover, if a plurality of voices *within* Parliamentary precincts could not affect government decisions, the only recourse would be to continue the debate outside the democratic agency of the parliamentary body.

In utter frustration, Mr. C. Suntharalingam, M.P. for Vavuniya, told the Prime Minister:

I shall consider that my work is outside and I shall also consider, Mr. Prime Minister, how we should wage this war, this war of justice, this war of righteousness. You are hoping for a united Ceylon. It is a simple matter, Mr. Prime Minister. Do not fear, I assure you, you will have a divided Ceylon with God's grace.<sup>4</sup>



The only national course which many could foresee was this violent aesthetic of dismemberment, what Natesan had referred to as "two torn little bleeding States." Having dismantled its own national charter by choosing to compete with the SLFP's Sinhala-Only campaign manifesto, the United National Party raised neither a protesting voice nor a voice pleading for adjustments. Rather, choosing to amputate one of the nation's most ancient and significant limbs, its Tamil-speaking population, the UNP voted along with the SLFP Government's decision.

Because of this inter-party competition, this overdetermined Bill, Act Number 33 of 1956, became law with effect from the twenty-fourth of September, 1956.

What we can observe from an examination of the manoeuvring leading to passage of the 1956 Bill is that neither passion for the Sinhala language nor desire for its development had guided the thinking of the Sinhala-Only protagonists. Had such passion been exclusively extant, there would have been no need to relegate Tamil to the margins. Rather, political opportunism had recognized a means for its own self-referential passion: those quick to employ the specious power of *divide et impere* could gain quick political mileage among the frustrated rural Sinhala masses.

What politician does not know the worth of promising socioeconomic mobility to the masses? That a majority vernacular would become a means toward village youth gaining, for example, coveted government jobs provided a useful carrot to hang before the electorate. Yet once the Sinhala-Only bill came to be implemented, we know that its proponents' children fled its consequences, having been sent to study in English in schools of both the United Kingdom and United States.

By having relegated English as well as Tamil to an inferior position in education, the "patriots" of Sinhala-Only deprived the masses, particularly rural youth, the opportunity of assimilating contemporary learning and knowledge. Such deprivation created a network of social imbalances which only deepened preexisting class difference.

In addition to being an economic weapon, in retrospect Sinhala-Only forms part of a major strategy.

Prof. E.F.C. Ludowyk put the influence of this bill in perspective when he observed:

Though Tamil, the language of two million people in Ceylon (if the stateless plantation workers are included) was the spoken language of thirty million in India, its inferior position in Ceylon was no different from that of Sinhalese in relation to everyday life. Its greater use in India in no way compensated for its degraded position in Ceylon. Danger of South Indian domination was more the product of Sinhalese feelings of guilt than Tamil policy. Sinhala-Only without regard for other language groups in the island could not but be resisted by the Ceylon Tamils - a minority of one million persons who were citizens of Ceylon. *Its sharp edge was in its economic point.* If there was a larger number of Tamils in the service of the state than in proportion to the numbers in the country, this was due to their greater industry and thrift. <sup>5</sup>

Ludowyk here defines the Bill's ground. If all competition arises from an original sense of scarcity, cultural and socioeconomic scarcity proved the appropriate wasteland from which communalist weeds could strangle through panic an entire population. As Ludowyk points out, the Bill's implicit (and perhaps, not entirely redeemable) promise was that its passage would assure Sinhalese abundant privilege in attaining government jobs.

Was such bitter factionalist promise carried out? Only partially, if one looks at the turmoil which the country had to undergo after the enactment of the 1956 Sinhala-Only bill.

The subsequent furor may have spoken to Bandaranaike. Having placed a large number of people under detention and the leaders of the Federal Party, including Members of Parliament, under house arrest, Mr. Bandaranaike then gave notice of a Bill "to make provision for the use of the Tamil language and to provide for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto" on the seventeenth of July, 1958.<sup>6</sup>

On the fifth of August, 1958, in Parliament, Bandaranaike's Bill was taken up for debate. Rejecting the Bill with fellow Lanka Samasamaja Party members, Dr. N.M. Perera issued a statement:

We re-iterate that the only solution for the language problem is one that will give proper official status to the Tamil language. This alone will ensure the unity of this country. However, we are also opposed to the very discussion of this

Bill in Parliament under conditions where (1) both the Sinhalese-speaking and Tamil-speaking masses are deprived of the democratic right of expressing their attitude to the proposed legislation, and (2) where the elected representatives of a very large section of the Tamils have been detained and deprived of their political freedom.<sup>7</sup>

Along with party members M.D.Banda, G.G.Ponnambalam, C.Suntharalingam, and others, Perera walked out of a House which had already symbolically denied his ideas dwelling.

Not wholly deterred, Bandaranaike hastened passage of the Tamil Language (Special Provisions) Act Number 28, passed in Parliament in 1958.

In supporting the Bill, Mr.Bandaranaike took a philosophical turn. He claimed the existence of competing nationalisms, of one or two “fundamental principles” which prompted him to ask: What is it that we are after?

Are we seeking to establish a Sinhalese imperialism, to forcibly make everybody speak Sinhalese or to establish a Tamil hegemony covering a large part of the world? Let us make quite clear what *we* want. If what *we* want is to live here, protecting and safeguarding what is valuable to the Sinhalese people, while giving fair and just recognition to the valuable things of *others*, so that we can live together as a friendly lot of citizens of this country, working in friendship for the progress of the country as a whole, that the line that we have adopted has been entirely justified...

The vision espoused speaks of a paternalistic desire to wreak justice upon minority rights. *We* will give “fair and just recognition” to the “valuable things of *others*.” According to Bandaranaike, the higher aim is not dominance but rather a utopian, symbiotic cohabitation — albeit with a clearly hierarchical notion of *noblesse oblige* — which leads to the “progress of the country as a whole.”

In the anti-imperialist mood of post-colonial Ceylon, Bandaranaike continues by denigrating the entire question of an official language, as well as its relevance to the nation’s situation:

Many people do not understand what is meant by the term “official language”. That is interpreted in various ways. The Official Language conception is a Western conception. In our country, we had no Official Language as such. Even in many Western Countries, they have no legal Official Language today; it has grown up by practice.

Ironically, Bandaranaike holds forth indigenous claims as a marker of a concept’s relevance. Yet he wishes to downplay the fear that such indigenous claim could be used to mark the relevance or legitimacy of an entire sector of the populace. “When you have a language declared by law as the Official Language,” he asks rhetorically, “what does it mean?” The answer he gives: that though such a language is recognised only for “necessary official acts,” it “does not mean a language that is thrust down the throats of everybody for every purpose.” Thus, following this logic, Sinhala can retain its privileged position: but such privilege, Bandaranaike assures his listeners, means little, and in its noblesse can even allow for some lesser brother to enter the fold:

What does this Bill itself do? Every one of its clauses is subject to the proviso that it does not conflict with the position of the Sinhalese Language as the Official Language of the country...

No one should be threatened, says Bandaranaike. Sinhalese remains the Official Language; a clubhouse set of ethics will prevail in language policy in which new conventions will only arise from extant courtesy. As Bandaranaike explains:

Any Tamil gentleman must have the right to correspond in the Tamil Language but the position of Sinhalese as the Official Language must be preserved. He [the Tamil gentleman] can be sent a reply in the Official Language, Sinhalese, but for the convenience of the Tamil gentleman who may not know Sinhalese, a copy of a Tamil translation or the substance of the reply will be attached to such letter. In these provinces (Northern and Eastern) we are going to permit certain administrative work to be done as prescribed...

Such “gentlemanly” conduct underwrites Bandaranaike’s further assurance to the Speaker and House that though there may be “a large number of Tamil citizens” in the Northern and Eastern Provinces:

...anybody who wants to transact any business in Sinhalese has the fullest power to do it not only in the Northern and Eastern Provinces but also in any part of the country. That concession is there and it can be made use of.<sup>8</sup>

Section 4 and 5 of the Tamil Language (Special Provisions) Act No.28 of 1958 provide for use of Tamil in the Northern and Eastern Provinces in both governmental correspondence with the public and within prescribed administrative work. However, Section 6 (1) of the said Act proved to be a decisively limiting factor, stating that the Minister "may make regulations to give effect to the principles and provisions of this Act." Until the regulations would be framed under this Act, because of what amounted to a loophole, the Act could—and did—remain ineffective in practice. In spite of the gentlemanly directives which Bandaranaike voiced, for eight years the Government managed to procrastinate formation of the Act's attendant regulations, rendering the Act's impact nil during a critical period in the nation's process of self-definition.

In 1965, after the General Elections, in the name of stability, a national government was established by the United National Party. As demonstration of its inclusive intention, this government invited Mr. M. Tiruchelvam Q.C., a Federal Party representative who had been a Senator rather than an elected Member of Parliament, to become a Cabinet Member.

Because of this manner of alliance, on the eighth of January, 1966, regulations under the Tamil Language (Special Provisions) Act No.28 of 1958 were finally introduced in Parliament. Those who had been content to let the ineffective 1958 Bill sit on the books now bleated their protest at these all-too-belated implementation measures which would render Tamil an official language. Among those who protested most vociferously were members of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party, as well as amid those of the SLFP's leftist allies and trade unions under their control.<sup>9</sup>

Speaking in support of the tardy regulations, Mr. J.R. Jayewardene explained the rationale behind their compulsory nature:

It was not possible in the Act to say regulations shall be made, therefore they said "may make regulations." And when you make regulations you cannot say, "you may write" but "you must write," so we are making it law that an official must reply in Tamil. You cannot leave it to his whims and fancies. He

must write. It is imperative. If he does not, he can be dismissed. If the word "shall" is not there, he need not write in Tamil. The regulation must be imperative. It is a *rajye neyogaya*.

Perhaps we can say that all compulsions carry on their flipside attendant freedoms. Jayawardene continues:

...no Tamil man should in any way be harassed or harmed by not being able to transact his business with the Government in Tamil. We say, therefore, for the transaction of all Government and Public business, the Tamil Language shall also be used. ... All Government and Public business in the Northern and Eastern Provinces is to be transacted in Sinhala and Tamil also.... If you have public business with a Government Department, or any other institution in Sinhala and Tamil, the records also must be in those languages.

One of the freedoms most frequently warranted within the worldwide history of multilingual policies has been that of fair access to information. Jayawardene illustrates one such scenario:

...if the Education Department holds an inquiry in which there are Tamil witnesses and a Tamil accused, evidence is taken in Tamil. There must be a Sinhalese translation also. The record is kept in both. The minutes come to Colombo Head Office of the Education Department. The officers there know only Sinhala; they have the record in Sinhala. The record in Tamil is there for the use of the Tamil-speaking people.

The access provided the population's two sectors will be legislated by a region's majority's requirements, but will show itself responsive to minority requests:

...the maintenance of public records in the Northern and Eastern Provinces [will be in] Tamil, and in other provinces Sinhala only . . . if a person writes to the Colombo Kachcheri in Tamil he gets a reply in Tamil. Even if he writes in Tamil to the Matara Kachcheri, he gets a reply in Tamil . . . If you write in Tamil, you get a reply in Tamil throughout the Island. That is what your law says . . .

Further, though this freedom is restricted to the Northern and Eastern Provinces, any local authority, such as Batticaloa's Urban Council, "which wants to conduct its business in Tamil...can do so":

If this Urban Council writes to the G.A. Colombo in Tamil it must get a reply in Tamil. Of course, you can send a reply in Sinhalese and keep a copy in Sinhalese for purpose of record. . . I think not one person will oppose these regulations we have proposed except the Members who say, "Sinhala and Sinhala only! Push it down the throats of the non-Sinhalese!"<sup>10</sup>

In supporting these regulations, then-Prime Minister Mr. Dudley Senanayake confirmed that the Northern and Eastern Provinces would possess two languages of administration.<sup>11</sup>

In support for the regulations, Mr. S.J.V. Chelvanayakam denoted the absolute necessity

...for a free people that they should be governed in their own language. If the people are not governed in their own language but in some other language, then those people are not a free people. In Ceylon, Tamil should be to the Tamil-speaking people what Sinhalese is to the Sinhalese-speaking people.

Chelvanayakam continued by relating pre- and post-Independence history. The 1944 State Council resolution had accepted the principle of equality of status for Sinhala and Tamil; on this basis Independence had been granted to the country; all political parties, until 1956, had agreed to "this fundamental principle of parity of status for Sinhala and Tamil":

This right of the Tamil-speaking people to transact their business with the government in their own language is the most elementary right.<sup>12</sup>

Chelvanayakam's primary regret was that, within adjustments reached under existing laws, such an elementary right could not be extended to areas outside the North-East.

Parliament subsequently passed these regulations as documented in Government Gazette No.14,653 of February 3, 1966. The Secretary to the Treasury conveyed the message to all public servants via Circular No.686 of March 26, 1966.

Three years after the passage of the regulations under the Act, the Treasury issued Circular No.760 of February 28, 1969, clarifying "The Policy of the Government with regard to the Official Language, Sinhala and the reasonable use of Tamil". As reason is a floating, unfixable quantity, we can note from the title alone how once again Tamil has been relegated to the position of a slip-hitch knot, one holding firm under the pressure of public opinion, but able to be released should other "reasonable" circumstances warrant.

Section 9.01 of this same circular categorically cautioned that "in deploying staff in Government offices, adequate consideration should be given to an officer's proficiency in Sinhala, [yet] care should be taken to ensure that transfers do not adversely affect the smooth working of Departments in the Official Language". In other words, the policing of the Official Language policy should not interfere with business as usual. The discriminatory feature of this circular is the dumb silence on the staff competent to work in Tamil, and the attendant need for Tamil typewriters. Unfortunately, such omission only presaged the further regression of future policy.

In May of 1970 the United Front was elected to power. Section 29 of the 1948 Constitution, popularly known as the Soulbury Constitution, had to a limited degree safeguarded minority rights and interests. It had also prevented Parliament from enacting laws detrimental to peace and good government.

The United Front dispensed with the admittedly ambiguous legacy of this entire Constitution. On May 22, 1972, Ceylon was re-named Sri Lanka and declared a Republic, with a new Republican Constitution which came into force. Article 12 of the new Constitution provided that "all laws written and unwritten, in force immediately before the commencement of the Constitution . . . except as otherwise expressly provided in the Constitution, continue in force."

Under these conditions, the Republican Constitution's Article 8(1) and (2) said that the Tamil Language (Special Provisions) Act No.28 of 1958 and the regulations passed under this Act remained effective:

...[they] shall not in any manner be interpreted as being a provision of the Constitution but shall be deemed to be subordinate legislation continuing in force as existing written law under the provisions of Section 13.

Additionally, Article 11(3),(4),(5) and (6) of the new Constitution provided for the use of Tamil in the courts for pleadings and applications. The National State Assembly of the Republic of Sri Lanka passed the Language of the Courts (Special Provisions) Law, No. 14 of 1973, whereby the use of Tamil in the Courts was defined. Regulations under this Law No. 14 of 1973 were passed by the National State Assembly and gazetted in Government Gazette Extra-Ordinary making further clarifications on the use of Tamil in Courts in the Northern and Eastern Provinces.

The significant feature of this Constitution is the absence of a clause like the Soulbury Constitution's Article 29 which had guaranteed some protection of minority rights. Further, the provisions on the use of the Tamil language generally are treated as subordinate legislation and not as Constitutional provisions. One stark fact so far ignored by students of this subject is that three pieces of legislation—the Official Language Act No.33 of 1956, the Tamil Language (Special Provisions) Act No.28 of 1958 and the Language of Courts (Special Provisions) Law No.14 of 1973—are as independent of one another as though they had occurred in a vacuum of legislative discourse.

Why? In yet another ironic scrambling of the need for clear communication when passing language laws, the 1958 and 1973 laws are no amendments to the Original Law No. 33 of 1956. Further, the preamble to these later two Laws say that they will be implemented "without conflicting with the provisions of" the Act No.33 of 1956: the second and third laws reiterate the position that the original Act shall not be infringed.

This plurality of directives within the law offers a variety of shelters for those resistant to the official use of Tamil. Under this equivocation, even an officer who willfully discards the laws' requirements regarding the use of Tamil cannot be dealt with, for he could always take cover under the stand that he merely continued to implement 1956's Sinhala-Only provisions. Legally irreproachable and original, the Sinhala-Only Law then continued to occupy a supreme position. Subsequent legal provisions lacking the usual clause "Notwithstanding anything to the contrary contained in any other Law" could only be interpreted as being superseded by the single Official Language Law - i.e. Act No.33 of 1956, warranting a Sinhala-Only policy, a founding policy.

As circular instructions' provisions prove of no legal avail, they become, with continued irony, mere language games. Until Act No.28 of 1958 and the regulations made thereunder, in addition to Law No.14 of 1973, took the

form of an actual amendment to Act No.33 of 1956, nothing tangible could be realized.

In the interests of implementation, during the period between 1970 and 1976, Mr. K.P. Ratnam several times surveyed various Ministers to research whether there were Tamil stenographers, typists and translators in the respective Ministries and Departments, Corporations or Statutory Boards that came under the Ministers' purview.

Barring a few exceptions, the reply always boomeranged back in the negative. Ministers of Information and Broadcasting<sup>13</sup> Fisheries,<sup>14</sup> Posts and Telecommunications,<sup>15</sup> and Labour<sup>16</sup> replied that there were no qualified Tamil speakers or writers. However, the Minister of Finance<sup>17</sup> gave the following information:

Treasury: 1 Tamil translator; 1 Tamil typist

Department of Inland Revenue: 3 Tamil typists

Department of Valuation: 1 Tamil typist

Central Bank: 3 Tamil typists

People's Bank: 1 Tamil translator; 3 Tamil stenographers

State Mortgage Bank: 1 Tamil typist

During the period of Ratnam's research, from 1970 to 1976, the grievances of the Tamil-speaking people had been accumulating. Exacerbating the collective and deep frustration was the refusal by Sirimavo Bandaranaike of an interview with Chelvanayakam, in which he would have discussed a six-point programme he had submitted to her. This growing sense of disenfranchisement on the part of Tamil speakers would surface within the 1977 election campaign as a series of promises made within the United National Party's manifesto.

## NOTES

- 1 Natesan, S., Hansard, Parliament of Ceylon, Vol.23, Columns - 1862, 1863, 1864, 1865, 20th January 1956.
- 2 Hansard, Parliament of Ceylon, Vol.24, Column 735, 5th June 1956.
- 3 Ibid, Column 1917, 14th June, 1956.
- 4 Ibid, Column 1939, 14th June, 1956.
- 5 Ludowyke, E.F.C., **Modern History of Ceylon**, pp.246/247
- 6 Hansard, Parliament of Ceylon, Vol.31, Col.11245, 17th July 1958.
- 7 Ibid, Column 1938, 5th August 1958.
- 8 Ibid, Columns 1967-68, 1971-72.
- 9 Hansard, Parliamentary Debates - Vol.64 Book I, Jan.08, 1966 - Cols. 39-44.
- 10 Ibid, Cols. 106, 108, 110, 112 to 114.
- 11 Ibid. Vol.64 - Bk. iv - Jan. 11, 1966. Cols.737.
- 12 Ibid. Column 130, Jan.08, 1966.
- 13 Perera, R.S., Minister of Information and Broadcasting, Hansard, NSA, Vol.4(ii) pt. 14, Jan.19, 1973, Col.2936-37.
- 14 Ibid, Col.2937.  
Jayaratne, S.D.R., Ministry of Fisheries.
- 15 Karunaratne, V.T.G., Dy.Minister of Posts and Telecommunications, Hansard, NSA, Vol.5 pt. 5, Feb.22, 1973, Col.549.
- 16 Ratnayake, K.B. Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Sports, on behalf of Minister of Labour, Hansard, NSA Vol.5 pt.7, March 03, 1973, Col.932 - 933.
- 17 Perera, N.M., Minister of Finance, Hansard, N.S.A., Vol.4 (ii) pt. 12., Jan.04, 1973.

**Table 1**

### APPOINTMENT OF STENOGRAPHERS, TYPISTS AND TRANSLATORS BETWEEN 22ND JULY 1977 AND MARCH 31. 1980

Posts	Total	Sinhalese	%	Tamils	%	Muslims	%
Stenographers	198	135	68.2	45	22.7	18	9.1
Typist	414	376	90.8	31	7.5	07	1.7
Translators	05	05	100.0	-	-	-	-

Source: Parliament Hansard. DSR, SL - Vol. 10 Pt. 17  
June 04, 1980 - 1480, 1504, 1496

## CHAPTER V

### FRESH HOPES UNDER NEW CONSTITUTION

In 1977, on the eve of the General Election, the United National Party issued its Party manifesto wherein it categorically stated:

... [that] the United National Party accepts the position that there are numerous problems confronting the Tamil-speaking people. The lack of a solution to their problems had made the Tamil-speaking people support even a movement for the creation of a separate state. In the interest of national integration and unity so necessary for the economic development of the whole country, the Party feels such problems should be solved without loss of time. The Party, when it comes to power, will take all possible steps to remedy their grievances in such fields as - (1) Education; (2) Colonization; (3) Use of the Tamil Language; (4) Employment in the Public and Semi-Public Corporations.

Simultaneously attracted by the UNP's promise and frustrated by the United Front government headed by Mrs. Sirimavo Bandaranaike, minorities outside the North and East supported the UNP. In the North and East the Tamil United Liberation Front received a mandate for the Vaddukkoddai resolution which called for, as last resort, the establishment of a separate state. Yet even in the North-East the UNP managed to receive a substantial share of support, and in July of 1977, was voted to power.

The young government announced that it would usher in a new constitution. On September 7, 1978, this new Constitution, in which the Republic of Sri Lanka was renamed the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, provided for an Executive Presidency. Though this Constitution made certain provisions for the use of the Tamil Language, and the resonant Article 19 did recognise Tamil as a national language, Article 18, all-too-aware of the potency of terminology, re-affirmed Sinhala as the official language.

Nonetheless, earlier and less powerful provisions supporting the use of Tamil as an official language were here finally assimilated into a stronger vehicle. For example, the new Constitution's Article 21 incorporates the provisions of Tamil Language (Special Provisions) Act No.28 of 1958.

Article 22, dealing with the language of administration, includes those regulations effective from February 3, 1966, which had been made under Tamil Language (Special Provisions) Act No. 28 of 1958. Section 24 incorporates the provisions of the earlier Language of Courts (Special Provisions) Law, No.14 of 1973.

Yet the genuine implementation of these provisions in the true spirit of the Constitution required concrete change in state infrastructure. Tamil stenographers, typists and translators would need to be trained and present throughout all areas of government. To effect such change, governmental will and determination to implement Constitutional provisions proved critical.

Answering a question in Parliament, the Minister of Public Administration gave details of the appointment of Tamil stenographers, typists and translators between July 22, 1977 and March 31, 1980 (See Table I for details.) What remains unknown was, apart from the question of the recent recruits ethnic identification, the number of new employees who showed proficiency in Sinhalese, Tamil, or English media. In the interest of implementing Tamil as a language of administration in the North-East, and in other districts warranted by constitutional provisions, such statistical ignorance proved obstructive.

Justice delayed is justice denied, as the judicial norm understands. After 1977, cases in appeal from largely Tamil-speaking areas were subject to such obstructive delays.

Situations for which recourse was promised abounded. For instance, Mr. K. Thurairatnam, then-Member of Parliament for Point Pedro, related to the Minister of Justice delays in disposal of appeals from Point Pedro's District Court due to the want of Tamil typists and translators in the appellate courts. Confirming the fact, the Deputy Minister of Justice promised to look into the matter.<sup>1</sup>

Likewise, Mr. W. Dahanayake, MP for Galle, informed the Minister of Home Affairs that Tamil-speaking residents of Galle suffered due to the

lack of a Tamil-speaking officer in Galle's Land and District Registry office. In reply, the Minister of Home Affairs promised that an officer was being posted to the office.<sup>2</sup>

Yet across the country the lack of implementation continued. Then-MP for Kayts, Mr. K.P. Ratnam, complained in Parliament that despite the President's directive the Ministry of Fisheries continued to send him letters in Sinhala, obviously because the Ministry did not have officers competent to handle Tamil correspondence.<sup>3</sup>

Because of the inadequacy of state officers to transact business in Tamil, great inconvenience continued to oppress the Tamil-speaking population. For example, the press generously reported the problems of the Punduloya Post Office.<sup>4</sup> At 1984's Annual General Meeting of the Sub-Postmasters Union, Tamil-speaking Sub-Postmasters spoke of hardships experienced by them due to the lack of a Tamil-speaking officer at the province-controlling Divisional Superintendent of Post Office in Amparai.<sup>5</sup> Such problems, related to as important an infrastructural element as a country's communication system, were hardly isolated.

Year after year in Parliament, when occasions arose, Tamil-speaking Members of Parliament complained of hardships undergone by the Tamil-speaking public due to the inadequacy of Tamil-speaking state officers. Mr. R. Sambandan, then-MP for Trincomalee, complained that the following officers in his district were all solely Sinhalese speakers: the Government Agent himself; Assistant Government Agent (Head-Quarters); Assistant Government Agent (Lands); District Land Officers; Acting Assistant Director of Social Services; Acting Assistant Director of Small Industries; Planning Officer; Assistant Commissioner of Agrarian Services; District Manager; Housing Department; District Forest Officer; Divisional Director of Irrigation; Director of Education; and the Assistant Commissioner of Local Government.

Further, Sambandan mentioned that not enough Tamil-speaking officers, stenographers, typists and clerks were recruited. He observed:

When a Tamil-speaking Member of the public goes to the Trincomalee Kachcheri, he cannot converse in his own language with any senior public official of any consequence.

Though the new Constitution had required public records to be maintained in Tamil in the North and East, the evidence, according to Sambandan, was sorely lacking. He asked the House: "How can Tamil be the Language of Administration also if this is the position in the North and East?"<sup>6</sup>

The MP for Pottuvil, Mr. M.A.M. Jalaldeen, also made complaints which revealed not only a lack of governmental good faith but also an inefficiency consequent upon the lack of Tamil speakers. Though the Amparai Kachcheri was the major government office in Jalaldeen's district, serving a largely Tamil-speaking population, most of its staff was constituted of non-Tamil-speaking Sinhalese. Unable to communicate with the bureaucratic level meant to serve it, the district's people tended to circumlocate the Kachcheri and speak directly to the top: in this case, the three Members of Parliament for Sammanturai, Pottuvil, and Kalmunai. In addition to requesting the appointment of more Tamil-speaking officers, Jalaldeen also requested the transference of all non-Tamil-speaking Assistant Government Agents out of his electorate.<sup>7</sup>

Replying to these criticisms, Mr. K.W. Devanayagam, Minister of Home Affairs, agreed that though there was a shortage of Tamil-speaking staff, he was helpless:

I would very much like to recruit Tamil-speaking officers. Although the Leader of the Opposition often says that we are not implementing the language provisions of the Constitution, we have no way of implementing the provisions in question because of the shortage of Tamil-speaking officers in every Kachcheri for the purpose of facilitating business not only in the Northern and Eastern Provinces but also in other Sinhalese areas. Even the Minister of Rural Industrial Development has been clamouring for Tamil-speaking officers in the Kachcheries in Midland areas. Even in my electorate there is a Sinhala-speaking officer because I cannot find a Tamil-speaking officer to be posted there.<sup>8</sup>

One can conjecture that such a lack of resources came from the unevenness of educational policy preceding the new Constitution. After Devanayagam's statement, there ensued a Parliamentary discussion in which figured Dr. Ranjith Attapattu, Minister of Colombo Group of Hospitals, and Major Montague Jayawickrema, Minister of Public Administration. The mentality underwriting this period's debate becomes clear if we eavesdrop upon a sample of this discussion:



**Dr. Ranjith Attapattu:** I do not deny his right to request that more Tamil-speaking people be employed in Government service and that his area be serviced adequately. Not very long ago there was a disproportionate number of Tamil-speaking Public Servants, which was of course due to various historical factors, mainly . . .

**Mr. A. Amirthalingam:** That was before 1956.

**Dr. Ranjith Attapattu:** I am not contesting your present position.

**Mr. Montague Jayawickrema:** Then Sir, their only grouse is with regard to the recruitment of people from the Tamil community. The Minister for Colombo Group of Hospitals and I totally agree with them and I want them to completely dispel any impression they may have that we are discriminating. We will look into this very carefully and every sentence of their speech would be analysed by the Ministry.<sup>9</sup>

Aside from the testiness apparent among the Ministers, it is evident that among the Ministers a consensual reality existed regarding the serious shortage of Tamil-speaking staff in the State Services. Additionally, non-implementation of the Constitutional provisions not only rendered the provision empty words, but also severely limited the employment horizon for Tamil speakers.

Undeterred by setbacks, and frequently spearheaded by Mr. K.P. Ratnam, Tamil Members of Parliament consistently questioned the government's delay in implementation of the Tamil language Constitutional provisions. In response, by 1978 the Government had appointed Mr. C. Rajadurai as Minister of Regional Development and Implementation of Tamil Language and Hindu Affairs.

Still, this appointment may have proved to be more of a pro forma response, one unwittingly designed to produce rather than lessen the intricacy of bureaucratic catacombs. On November 20, 1979, Ratnam complained that when both the President and the Minister-in-Charge were addressed on the question of implementing the Tamil language provisions, they replied that the Attorney General was being consulted with regard to legal implications. Later both replied by stating the obvious: a Tamil Minister, Rajadurai, had been appointed to give effect to the Constitutional provisions.<sup>10</sup>

On August 6, 1980, Ratnam again asked regarding the action taken to implement Constitutional provisions. As Minister Rajadurai was absent, two Deputy Ministers later undertook to bring it to his attention.<sup>11</sup>

On September 5, 1980, Ratnam repeated this question:

My first question is addressed to the Minister of Regional Development. I should like to know when the guidelines sanctioned by the Cabinet for the implementation of the Tamil language rights guaranteed by the Constitution will be issued. Last time, I was told that the guidelines would be issued. That assurance was given more than a month ago. I want to know when these guidelines will be issued. My second question is connected to the above. I wish to know what action has been taken so far to start training classes for the training of Tamil typists and stenographers. Whenever we inquire about the position of the implementation of the Tamil language rights, all Departments say that there is a shortage of Tamil typists and stenographers. The last time I raised this question in the House I was told that classes would be started as early as possible. I understand that so far, nothing has been done. I request the Minister to tell me when the classes will be started.<sup>12</sup>

Ratnam's question went unanswered. When this question was further pressed on November 6, 1981, Minister Rajadurai replied that the circular containing the instructions on the implementation of the Tamil language provisions of the Constitution would be issued in a week or two with Cabinet sanction.<sup>13</sup>

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the circular was never issued. Again, on February 26, 1982, Ratnam had to raise this issue in Parliament:

As the circular for the implementation of the Tamil Language Rights has not yet been issued, in spite of the Honorable Minister's assurance in this House on 6th November, 1981, that he would get the Cabinet sanction within one or two weeks to implement it, I am asking again, for the sixth time, when this circular will be issued.<sup>14</sup>

Neither Minister Rajadurai nor any other voice of the government replied.

Ratnam was not the only MP pursuing this elusive ideal of adequate linguistic representation. Mr. M. Alalasundaram, then-MP for Kopay, said that although some officers had tried to effect the provisions to transact business in Tamil, they had found the unavailability of Tamil typewriters and typists a great hindrance. In Tamil-speaking areas, continued Alalasundaram, many government offices in the Tamil areas have no typewriters. He urged the Minister to take action to supply Tamil typewriters and appoint Tamil typists.<sup>15</sup>

The indefatigable Ratnam complained again in Parliament that the previous appointment of a Tamil minister prove an insufficient reply to the issue of implementing Constitutional Tamil language provisions. The appointed Minister seemed incapable of implementation, Ratnam argued, as on the fifth occasion the topic was discussed in the House Rajadurai had given a final assurance that he would issue the circular in two weeks. Two months having passed from such assurance, a disillusioned Ratnam felt that there was little point bringing the grievances of the people to the notice of the Government.<sup>16</sup>

On August 19, 1982, when Supplementary Estimates for the Regional Development Ministry were being discussed in Parliament, Mr. V. Yogeswaran continued to express this disillusionment:

... [that] the implementation of the Tamil Language Act is a dead letter. It is a fraud. There is no question about that. The Tamil people have been taken for a big ride . . . The Tamil Language (Special Provisions) Act is a dead letter. It is like the famous emperor's robe. Everybody is saying that the man is coming down in golden robes, but I see him stark naked.<sup>17</sup>

Answering these colorful criticisms, Minister Rajadurai said that the circular on the subject drafted by his Ministry had been studied several times and, though still only a draft, had been amended by the Ministry of Public Administration and the Attorney-General's Department. He also said that his Ministry and the Ministry of Public Administration were further studying the possibilities of adding any other clauses that would dispel the misgivings of the Tamil-speaking population. Continuing further, the Minister said that the District Councils that had been established had created the opportunity, in the North and East, of transacting all business in Tamil. He mentioned that schemes had begun to address the need to train officers in Tamil stenography and typewriting and to supply Tamil typewriters to governmental

departments. When this scheme had been completed, promised Rajadurai, even Tamils outside the North and East would be able to transact their business with the government in Tamil.<sup>18</sup>

On September 9, 1982, Ratnam again raised the issue. He asked Minister Rajadurai whether the Cabinet had approved the draft circular. The Minister said that he wanted an additional two months in order to answer the question.<sup>19</sup>

One month later, on November 3, 1982, Rajadurai's Ministry of Regional Development and Implementation of Tamil and Hindu Religious Affairs again underwent criticism. A supplementary vote for the Ministry regarding cover-up expenses incurred in conducting the World Hindu Conference was being discussed.

Here again the tantalising circular figured. Mr. T. Sivasithamparam, then-MP for Vavuniya, protested that the circular had not been issued.<sup>20</sup> Mr. A. Amirthalingam, then-Leader of the Opposition, observed the shifting of responsibility that had occurred:

... it is now more than four years since this constitution was enacted containing certain provisions with regard to the use of the Tamil Language. If we ask His Excellency the President why are these provisions not implemented? the answer we get is: 'Why? I have appointed your man to look after these matters: ask him.' That is all that His Excellency says, and that is what the Honorable Ministers of the Government say. But when we ask this Honorable Minister, he says: 'Oh, the circular is coming next month, the month after or the month after.' And it goes on like that.

Amirthalingam went on to ask whether another four years would be required in which another circular on implementation would be prepared. Or, he hazarded, "is it that they do not want to implement those provisions and that those are there only as an eye-wash?" He continued by describing an abuse which might not have occurred had the circular been issued: "would the Honorable Minister of Regional Development (Rajadurai) have sent a letter in Sinhala only to the Honorable Member for Vavuniya?"

Amirthalingam continues by reminding the assembly of the Constitutional right to correspond in one's own language, whether Sinhala or Tamil.

Because of Rajadurai's failure to prepare and issue the circular, says Sivasithamparam, "everybody is treating the provisions in the Constitution regarding the use of the Tamil language as a dead letter."

Moreover, with no mean dose of sarcasm, Amirthalingam emphasizes that Tamil typewriters must be obtained before "the Honorable Minister thinks of appointing female typists." The circular must be issued before Rajadurai resigns and before Rajadurai must "take the blame of having thwarted the Tamil Language provision of the Constitution by his inaction".<sup>21</sup>

Rajadurai having made no reply, a few weeks later, on November 25, 1982, Mr. K.P. Ratnam asked him:

- (1) Whether the Cabinet has approved the draft circular containing the guidelines to implement the Tamil Language Rights?
- (2) When this draft circular was submitted to the Cabinet? and
- (3) When will this circular be issued?

Minister Rajadurai now replied, saying that the Cabinet to which the circular was submitted on December 27, 1980, had not yet approved the draft circular. Without such approval, the circular could not be issued.<sup>22</sup>

Here we might pause to set out the chronology of the delay's and its consequences:

- (i) The draft circular on the implementation of Tamil language provisions in the Constitution promulgated in September, 1978, was submitted to the Cabinet after two years on December 27, 1980.
- (ii) In 1982, the Cabinet had yet to confirm implementation.
- (iii) Consequently, recruitment of Tamil-speaking staff to man the administration had been gravely handicapped.

Mr. K.W. Dewanayagam, Minister of Home Affairs, directly in charge of Internal Administration at the district level, repeatedly admitted the problematic situation. On December 11, 1981, referring to the Language Department, he lamented the insufficiency of Tamil officers to "translate

this provision." Dewanayagam had found it difficult to recruit even for his own offices qualified Tamil speakers and writers. Without such resources, Dewanayagam foresaw, implementation would prove well - nigh impossible.

Regarding the drafting of the circular he added:

... [that] having considered all these difficulties, the Cabinet has appointed a committee consisting of the Honorable Minister of Regional Development, Rural Industries, Transport and Foreign Affairs, and the Honorable Deputy Minister of Finance to go into this problem and draw up ways and means and to find out how it can be implemented. . . In the final implementation, the authority is probably the Honorable Minister of Public Administration. The last time we met, we framed these circulars which are still in the process of being evaluated by the Attorney-General because we find that there is some differences with regard to the official capacity in which it can be done.<sup>23</sup>

Complaints of non-implementation of the Constitutional provisions for the Tamil language figured again in 1983 during a discussion on budget proposals. Mr. A. Amirthalingam, then Leader of the Opposition, referred to his own experience: even as a Member of Parliament, he said, he continued to receive letters in Sinhala. He also complained that as Sinhalese judicial officers manned the Vavuniya courts, contrary to Constitutional provisions court records were maintained in Sinhala.

Employment promises had fallen into the same quagmire. Though the President had written to Amirthalingam "as early as 1979" that the Tamil-speaking population had justifiable "grievance in the matter of employment," nothing had been done. If, as Amirthalingam continued, recruitment in both public and semi-public sectors were to follow a population ratio, for six years nothing had ameliorated discriminatory hiring practices. What such inaction led to was a resistance which Amirthalingam framed as the following question: "How can we co-operate when not one of the grievances that the Tamil people have put forward has been remedied?":

Though many of the honorable back-benchers of the government seem to think that everything has been done, that they have done a lot for us, I ask any Honorable Minister to get up and say . . . one substantial matter that they have done

to remove the grievances of the Tamil people after they came into power in 1977.

Referring to the oft-flaunted District Development Councils established two years earlier Amirthalingam described how, due to the lack of funds allocated them, they had been crippled in their provision of services. Further:

On matters where the remedying of grievances of the Tamil people are concerned, the Government moves at a snails pace, but on matters where the Tamil people had to be put down, they move at jet speed.

He anticipated retorts by saying that a few exceptions stood out solely because they were exceptions: that there were, for instance, a few Tamils in the diplomatic corps, but that these exceptions were carry-overs from a quickly receding past. Instead, Amirthalingam urged, one should examine the composition of the lower ranks of public service. Not even the Public Administration Ministry employed enough Administrative Service Tamils to serve as Assistant Government Agents in Tamil areas. Amirthalingam concluded by noting that the Home Affairs Minister had both on the House's floor and in discussions with the President admitted the disproportion in hiring practices.<sup>24</sup>

Responding to the complaints of Mr. A. Amirthalingam, Prime Minister R. Premadasa said:

In order to do justice to the Tamil-speaking people, we have included certain provisions in the Constitution. The Leader of the Opposition said that certain circulars have not been issued. I wish to state here: as a government, we have decided to implement all the provisions, and that all those responsible must take action. I wish to state on behalf of the Government that we shall take suitable action where such action has not been taken.<sup>25</sup>

To make good such Parliamentary assurance, Premadasa appointed a high-powered Committee comprised of senior Secretaries of Ministries headed by Mr. Bradman Weerakoon, Secretary to the Prime Minister. Having delved into the question of implementing the Constitution's Tamil language provisions, the Committee was to devise means and advise the

Government on implementation. Other Members included: D.B.I.P.S. Siriwardhana, R. Paskaralingam, Cyril Gamage, E.L. Wijemanne, P. Ramalingam and C. Chanmugam.<sup>26</sup>

Perhaps expectably, nothing came of this drum and timbrel flourish.

On August 4, 1983, Home Affairs Minister K.W. Dewanayagam again decried the delayed implementation of the Tamil language provisions. The Constitution's Sixth Amendment proved relevant:

Of course, there is very little left to be fulfilled because of the lack of implementation of the Constitution. I must say that the root cause for the entire dissatisfaction of the minority is the lack of implementation. I remember, when this was taken up in the Cabinet. His Excellency in exasperation said: "How can you expect a Sinhala Minister to administer your Tamil Language?" It is a fact that thereafter a committee was formed and it was entrusted to the Minister of Regional Development. I think he has not fully done his duty. Otherwise, it will not be in this state. I say it with great distress.<sup>27</sup>

In 1983, shortcomings in the use of the Tamil language and the lack of Tamil-speaking officers were also pinpointed by Mannar's District Minister Mr. M.E.M. Maharoo<sup>28</sup> as well as Pottuvil's MP, Mr. M.I. Uthumalebbe.<sup>29</sup> While speaking on the Votes of the Regional Development Ministry in Parliament on December 22, 1983, Mr. Anura Bandaranaike, Leader of the Opposition, gently criticized the Regional Development Ministry for its increasingly unjustifiable delay.<sup>30</sup>

In reply, Minister Rajadurai explained that implementation of Constitutional Tamil language provisions could not be done in a hurry. First, a Cabinet Sub-Committee must advise the Ministry; after which decisions could be communicated to the Public Administration Ministry for further observations; after which, the Attorney-General's comments and advice would be sought. As a result, said a Rajadurai who had been in charge of implementation for five years, a certain amount of delay was inevitable.<sup>31</sup>

Once again, this oft-mentioned magic circular, bearing instructions for the implementation of Tamil language rights, remained a distant— if tantalising— mirage.

Yet finally, in 1984, Rajadurai's Ministry of Regional Development, Implementation of Tamil Language and Hindu Affairs drew the attention of Government Agents in the Northern and Eastern Provinces to the Tamil language Constitutional provisions regarding administration in the North and East.

Looking more closely however, one finds that this much-anticipated circular letter draws a full circle: it refers to Public Administration Circular No. 242 of March 8, 1984, which in turn only reproduces Constitutional Articles relating to the use of the Tamil language with a request that those provisions must be strictly observed.

The Regional Development Ministry Circular referred to decisions made during the Cabinet meeting of January 25, 1984. Five months later, these decisions are published in Circular No.ADM/TLP/84 of June 26, 1984.

Amid this paper mill of circulars from both the Public Administration Ministry and the Regional Development Ministry there remains a profound silence on the need for Tamil typewriters, Tamil typists, Tamil stenographers and Tamil translators. Without these resources, implementation anyway could in no wise be enforced or achieved. Further, the circulars in their current form specify only that Tamil can be used within the ambit of Sinhala, the official language of Sri Lanka. Such as they are, these documents provide for crumbs from the long-promised feast of *the Circular*.

Further, as Sinhala still at this juncture remained the singular official language, any reasonable and meaningful position that may have been accorded to Tamil was bound to be interpreted as conflicting legally with the Sinhala- Only Law. If any genuine change were to be implemented, an amendment to the Official Language Act which would have, according to the nation's pre-existing Constitution, made Tamil an equivalent language of administration in the Northern and Eastern Provinces was indispensable.

We might ask ourselves how so many bureaucratic road-blocks appeared always at a fortuitous enough time to block passage of any significant implementation. One example might suffice: on May 7th, 1979, the Justice Ministry had sent a directive to all the island's courts. The Ministry permitted "the use of English Language for all purposes in or in relation to the records and proceedings in all Courts throughout Sri Lanka."

However, a proviso to the directive cautioned that English could be used only "provided . . . that the pleadings, applications and motions in all such cases shall also be in such National language as is used in such court".

Acting under this directive, Colombo's Additional District Judge rejected a pleading filed in Tamil in case No.3007/RE and directed the defendant to file pleadings in Sinhala. Perturbed, the defendant pursued his case to the Court of Appeal. While agreeing that the rejection was invalid, the Court of Appeal referred the matter, under Article 125 of the Constitution, to the Supreme Court for a ruling on the constitutional question involved.

In case Coomaraswamy vs. Shanmugaratna Iyer, No:1/80 CA, the court held that the proviso in the Justice Ministry's 1979 directive was *ultra vires* the Constitution.<sup>32</sup> Though the case successfully resulted in the defendant's Tamil pleadings being accepted, we can see from this expenditure of both time and good will the manner in which even Constitutional provisions regarding the Tamil language were viewed and handled by an administration more than reluctant to change.

#### NOTES

- 1 Thurairatnam. K., Parliament Hansard, DSR, SL, Vol.10, Pt.10, June 04, 1980, Col.1522-1523.
- 2 Dhahanayake. W., Parliament Hansard, DSR, SL, Vol.21, Pt.15, November 05, 1982.
- 3 Ratnam K.P., Parliament Hansard, DSR, SL, Vol.20, Pt.7, June 09, 1982, Col.614.
- 4 Virakesari, January 03, 1983.
- 5 Thinakaran, February 22, 1984
- 6 Sambandan. R., Parliament Hansard, DSR, SL, Vol.13, Pt.8, December 04, 1980, Col.1744-1747
- 7 Jalaldeen. M.A.M., Parliament Hansard, DSR, SL, Vol.13, Pt.9, December 05, 1980.
- 8 Dewanayagam. K.W., Parliament Hansard, DSR, SL, Vol.13, Pt.9, December 05, 1980, Col.1922-1923.

- 9 Montague Jayawickrema., Parliament Hansard, DSR, SL, Vol.13, Ptd.8, December 04, 1980, Col.1751-1752, 1791.
- 10 Ratnam, K.P., DSR, SL, Parliament Hansard, Vol.7, Pt.3, November 20, 1979, Col.679-680.
- 11 Ratnam, K.P., DSR, SL, Parliament Hansard Vol.11, Pt.4, August 06, 1980, Col.337.
- 12 Ratnam K.P., DSR, SL, Parliament Hansard, Vol.11, Pt.12, SEpt. 05, 1980, Col.1142.
- 13 Rajadurai, C., DSR, SL, Parliament Hansard - November 06, 1981, Col.2597
- 14 Ratnam. K.P., DSR, SL, Parliament Hansard, Vol.19, Pt.10, February 26, 1982, Col.1681.
- 15 Alalasundaram. M., DSR, SL, Parliament Hansard, Vol.20, Pt.11, July 07, 1982, Col.926-927.
- 16 Ratnam K. P., DSR, SL, Parliament Hansard, Vol. 21, Pt. 4, August 19, 1982, Col. 1425
- 17 Yogeswaran. V., DSR., SL, Parliament Hansard, Vol.2, Pt.4, August 19, 1982, Col.438-439.
- 18 Rajadurai. C., DSR, SL, Parliament Hansard, Vol.21, Pt.4, August 19, 1982, Col.443-444.
- 19 Ratnam, K.P. DSR, SL, Parliament Hansard, Vol.21, Pt.9, September 09, 1982.
- 20 Sivasithamparam. T., DSR, SL, Parliament Hansard, Vol.21, Ptd.13, November 03, 1982, Col.1407.
- 21 Amirthalingam. A., DSR, SL, Parliament Hansard, Vol.21, Pt. 13, November 03, 1982, Col.1419-1420.
- 22 Ratnam K.P. DSR, SL, Parliament Hansard, Vol.21, Pt.16, November 25, 1982, Col.1095-1096.
- 23 Dewanayagam. K.W. DSR, SL, Parliament Hansard, Vol.18, Pt.9, December 11, 1981, Col.2454-2455.
- 24 Amirthalingam. A., DSR, SL, Parliament Hansard, Vol.22, Pt.12, March 18, 1983, Col.1758-1759.
- 25 Premadasa. R., DSR, SL, Parliament Hansard, Vol.23, Pt.I, March 21, 1983, Col.25.
- 26 Ceylon Daily News, 06, June 1983.
- 27 Dewanayagam. K.W, DSR, SL, Parliament Hansard, Vol.27, Ptd.18, August 04, 1983, Col.1378
- 28 DSR, SL, Parliament Hansard, Vol.27, Ptd.18, December 22, 1983, Col.2237.
- 29 Ibid. Col.2249.
- 30 Bandaranaike, Anura., DSR, SL, Parliament Hansard, Vol.27, Pt.18, December 22, 1983, Col.2234-2235.
- 31 Rajadurai. C., DSR, SL, Parliament Hansard, Vol.27, Pt.18, December 22, 1983, Col.2256.
- 32 Sriskanthas Law Reports, Coomaraswamy Vs. SHanmugaratna Iyer Vol.1 Part 12 - pp.159-163.

## CHAPTER VI

### TAMIL PUSHED TO BACK - STAGE IN PARLIAMENT

Not only had the government failed to resolve policy issues related to the Tamil language, but, as testified by the UNP's 1977 General Election Manifesto of 1977, it had become preoccupied with finding military solutions to the Tamils' legitimate grievances. With the passage in 1983 of the Sixth Amendment to the Constitution, Tamil members of Parliament who really did matter in finding linguistic and other means of creating a democratic forum were thrown out of Parliament. This proved to be one of the most effective ways in which Tamils were cut off from mainstream political activities and participatory democracy. It is outside the scope of this paper to discuss the Sixth Amendment; suffice it to say that both the Amendment and the circumstances under which it was passed in Parliament are a blot on the history of this country and accepted democratic traditions.

The government continued to signal abandonment of democratic commitment. Commencing on May 26th, 1987, its full-scale military venture, Operation Liberation Vadamardchy, cost over 750 human lives. Citizens could read the operation's dark message: the government would forcibly suppress Tamils' request for restoration of lost rights.

India soon entered this hapless situation. An accord was reached between the governments of Sri Lanka and India and signed on July 29th, 1987. While the Accord provided for Sinhala, Tamil and English languages to be administrative languages<sup>1</sup>, it took one year to amend the Constitution toward this end. From December 17th, 1988, the Sixteenth Amendment to the Constitution which gave effect to the Accord's provision became operative.

However, the Sixteenth Amendment did not alter Articles 8 and 19 of the Constitution which said (a) The official language of Sri Lanka shall be Sinhala and (b) The national languages of Sri Lanka shall be Sinhala and Tamil. The Sixteenth Amendment repealed only Articles 22 and 23 of the Original Constitution and substituted two new articles: 22 and 23.

Examining these additions, we find that Article 22 does not provide for Tamil's parity with Sinhalese. Instead, in the North-Eastern Province, the article provides for the use of Tamil as a language of administration and in other areas only for restricted use. Article 18 should have been amended to say that the national languages— Sinhala, Tamil and English— would be Sri Lanka's official languages. To the new additions' credit, Article 25 A does remove prior ambiguities in legal interpretation as it categorically states that the provisions of this Chapter supersedes all other laws. Still, one is unable to understand the motive for the new articles' equivocation: Tamil remains a less-than-official language.

Expectably, despite ostensible legal changes, still nothing tangible resulted and complaints about non-compliance with Tamil language provisions continued.

As problems within the government continued to fester, Tamil politicians decided to rejoin Parliament, notwithstanding the Sixth Amendment which had forced their exit. After the General Election of 1989, Mr. A. Amirthalingam re-entered Parliament only to find the shocking extent to which between 1983 and 1989 the position of the Tamil language had deteriorated even within Parliamentary procedure.

Mr. Amirthalingam observed that from 1960 onward, all Parliamentary documents had been supplied to Members as "an accepted and enforced practice." Now, he said, in 1989, Budget estimates were being supplied only in Sinhalese and English, even to Tamil-speaking Members:

Thinking that Tamil copies would be given to us, I sent a note to the Secretary-General yesterday. I got a reply signed by the Director of Budget. In it, it was stated that due to lack of officers - officers competent in Tamil - since 1983 the Budget Estimates are neither prepared in Tamil nor printed in Tamil. And as a result during the past five or six years it has not been issued to Tamil Members of Parliament.

Amirthalingam continued by citing in Tamil the Standing Orders which stated that "every Member of Parliament has the right to participate in the proceedings of this House in the Tamil language." He also cited non-compliance with the Sixteenth Amendment which had declared Tamil as one of the official languages. As very few Parliamentary officers possessed Tamil proficiency, the practical support structure had vanished.

## CHAPTER VII

### IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SIXTEENTH AMENDMENT BY PROVINCIAL COUNCILS AND LOCAL BODIES

One quarter— approximately fifty— of the newly-elected House Members spoke Tamil, and among those some knew only Tamil. As occasional showpiece translations of documents into Tamil proved to be insignificant showpieces Amirthalingam attempted to rally his fellow members.

Member K.B. Ratnayake inquired in Tamil whether this deterioration had resulted after the declaration of Tamil as an official language. Amirthalingam drove his point home by mentioning that even after the government had boasted internationally about the Sixteenth Amendment, it had shown its ineffectiveness by not keeping its own laws within its House.

The Speaker expressed regret at the situation and promised to look into grievances. He also warned all Ministers that in future no document would be distributed unless it is in all three languages.<sup>2</sup> Yet despite the Speaker's promise and caution, the situation thereafter did not improve. Mr. D.M. Jayaratne, M.P. for Kandy District, drew the Speaker's attention to the fact that due to the insufficient numbers of Tamil translators and interpreters, questions in Parliament lay unanswered.<sup>3</sup> Parliament having proven itself to be ineffective, the power to implement the Sixteenth Amendment would soon devolve to a more specific level of administration.

#### NOTES

- 1 Indo-Lanka Accord of 29th July, 1987 - Clause 2:18
- 2 The Chairman, Ibid. Col.1575.
- 3 Virakesari - 24.1.1990.

President Ranasinghe Premadasa mooted the idea of appointing an Official Languages Commission to monitor the implementation of the Sixteenth Amendment to the Constitution. At its meeting of October 12th, 1989, the Cabinet ratified Premadasa's proposal.<sup>1</sup>

Deterred, the idea of democratic linguistic representation had nevertheless not been lost. Mr. Chandra Bandara, then Minister of Public Administration, at a Conference of Government Agents gave the Agents authority to recruit translators, typists and stenographers to implement the Constitution's Sixteenth Amendment. He advised them to recruit retired teachers, graduates and GCE (A/L) qualified officials who were competent in both Sinhala and Tamil to meet the implementation demands.<sup>2</sup>

Mr. U.B. Wijekoon, then Minister of Public Administration, reiterated this view. He added that it was the responsibility of governmental departments and corporations to make such Tamil-language appointments. The Official Language Department, he said, would be renamed the Official Languages Department and would have a Tamil Unit. Significantly, Wijekoon added that those who failed to use Tamil whenever necessary would be punished. Further, he promised that an Official Languages Commission would be appointed.<sup>3</sup> Following this general trend, the government also announced that name-boards countrywide would be in all three languages. The government extended its reach into the corporate sphere, adding that all office reception centers should possess facilities for processing both Sinhala and Tamil.<sup>4</sup>

In its report of February 15, 1990, the Presidential Commission on Youth recommended:

- (a) the full implementation of the Sixteenth Amendment to the Constitution;



- (b) investing the Commission of Official Languages with broad powers to inquire into discrimination felt by Tamil and Sinhala-speaking people and intervene decisively so as to prevent these issues from galvanizing into political discontent. It is necessary to deal with these issues at the level of a Commission so that the day-to-day interaction of the State with ethnic minorities does not serve to alienate them.<sup>5</sup>

The Official Languages Commission Law became operative from March 27, 1991. The appointment of members to the Commission was made on November 13th, 1991. The Commission became functional only from December 1, 1991. By the time gap between each action we can see the slow pace at which matters relating to Tamil affairs have been managed.

A single example will suffice. Even the long-shelved Act No. 33 of 1956 which stipulated that new governmental appointees must acquire Sinhala proficiency continued to run, long after the passage of the equitable Sixteenth Amendment, in the Government Gazette. Though the print media focused attention on this irrelevancy, the stipulation was altered only after a year.<sup>6</sup>

Against this background, let us examine how implementation has taken place in various institutions.

### **Provincial Councils**

The Provincial Councils system was born one year before the Sixteenth Amendment. Three years elapsed before the Councils became functional. As the power required for the Councils' existence has still not been devolved, the system continues to remain a showpiece in which individual Councils blame the governmental center for their crippled abilities.

We can note the low status to which the government relegates the Council system by the following physicalisation: at government functions, the Councils' Chief Minister, who should enjoy the status of a Deputy Prime Minister, is seated behind the Assistant Government Agents. By this token, among many others, the center denigrates the Council system.

No wonder, therefore, that the Provincial Councils are finding existence difficult, unable to effect any meaningful change. That those at the Center should be allergic to sharing power at the grassroots level, while not entirely

surprising, shows the way in which Sri Lanka has at times so half-heartedly cultivated participatory democracy.

A Catch-22 becomes operative. In order to implement the Sixteenth Amendment, the government requires the active involvement of the Provincial Councils. In order to be actively involved, the Provincial Councils require a proper devolution of power and allocation from the government.

A perusal of Annexure 'A' will convince the reader of the strange inefficacy which attended the Sixteenth Amendment. Mr. A. William, Provincial Council Member of Sabaragamuwa Provincial Council, aptly pointed out that though the Provincial Councils had been created to resolve the ethnic crisis, they were unable even to resolve the question of Tamil language usage within their own administration.<sup>7</sup>

On October 31, 1991, Mr. M.S. Mohamed Agram, member of the Southern Province Provincial Council, observed the deep and wide consequences of what earlier could have seemed mere bureaucratic laziness:

We must pause to think what the base of the LTTE problem in the North-East is. The agitation was for recognition of language rights. It has today blown up into a demand for separation by the LTTE. If the language problem had been resolved then, this situation would not have arisen. Although today the Government claims to have accorded due place to Tamil language, it cannot be accepted when [the] Tamil language is being disfigured; not until Tamil-speaking officers, are appointed to offices under the Provincial Councils and the Government. Only then can we stop disfiguring the Tamil language.<sup>8</sup>

If deeply-rooted, this disfigurement was also widespread. After Agram's tracing of the lineage of the LTTE unrest, Mr. A.L. Abdul Majeed, Member of the now-dissolved North-Eastern Provincial Council, appealed to the Minister of Public Administration, Provincial Councils and Home Affairs to rectify the situation in the Ampara District's administration where the use of Tamil was not being implemented.<sup>9</sup> Majeed added what had become obvious: though the Sri Lankan government may content itself with enacting laws, it does not overly concern itself with such laws' implementation.

## Pradeshiya Sabhas

The Pradeshiya Sabha, or District Council, is a form of local administration which offers no substitute for the larger unit, the Provincial Council. Annexure 'B' shows how even Pradeshiya Sabhas are not able to implement Tamil as a language of administration.

## Municipal and Urban Councils

Even the smallest units of administration, the most local of bodies, were finding it difficult to implement Tamil as a language of administration. Why? The same reason obtained: all too few Tamil-speaking officers were available.

Mr. S. Jeevaratnam, Member of the Colombo Municipal Council, appealed to former President Premadasa to direct the Council to send letters to Tamil-speaking Members in Tamil.<sup>10</sup> If such a request must go out in the heart of the Capital, we can only imagine the scarcity of resources in the suburbs and outstations.

We might look at the relative activity of the Matale Municipal Council which represents a town in which ninety percent of residents speak Tamil. Mr. Jaffer Deen, former UNP Member of the Matale Municipal Council, had vociferously criticized the Council for not having implemented Tamil as a language of administration.<sup>11</sup> All official documents were being supplied only in Sinhala and the Council's signboard was written in broken Tamil.<sup>12</sup> These elisions occurred not only within a town possessing a Tamil-speaking majority, but also within one where residents' agitation against Sinhala-only signboards had not prevented new ones from going up.<sup>13, 14</sup>

Because of the people's organised response, then- Mayor Ranjith Aluvihare acceded and not only had signboards rewritten in Sinhala and Tamil, but attempted to redress other issues: for instance, the lack of Tamil periodicals in the Municipal Council-run Public Library. For all of these improvements by their mayor, Matale's people voiced gratitude regarding the restoration of their rights.<sup>15, 16, 17</sup> Despite this seemingly optimum situation, later reports claimed that the linguistic situation in Matale continued to prove not entirely encouraging or satisfactory.

Having viewed the roadblocks encountered by a town led by a responsive mayor, one might return to the question: what function and purpose is served by deeming a language official?

## NOTES

- 1 Virakesari, 13.10.1989
- 2 Ibid, 11.10.1989
- 3 Ibid, 14.10.1989
- 4 Ibid, 17.10.1989
- 5 Sessional Paper No.1 of 1990
- 6 Manoharan, T., Virakesari, 18.3.1989, 2.2.1990  
Gunam, Virakesari - 23.10.89  
Thickavayal - Virakesari - 18.11.89  
Demand of Community Centres' Federation, Jaffna, 7.11.89
- 7 William, A, Virakesari, 26.11.1991
- 8 Agram, Mohamed, M.S., Virakesari, 5.11.91
- 9 Majeed Abdul, A.L., Virakesari 8.5.1990
- 10 Jeevaratnam, S., Virakesari 8.7.91
- 11 Deen, Jaffer, Virakesari, 23.11.89
- 12 Virakesari, 26.5.90
- 13 Virakesari, 31.10.90
- 14 Virakesari, 22.12.90
- 15 Virakesari, 28.11.91
- 16 Virakesari, 7.8.91
- 17 Virakesari, 28.11.91

**ANNEXURE A**  
**PROVINCIAL COUNCILS**  
**WESTERN PROVINCE**

SERIAL NO.	SOURCE	NAME OF COMPLAINANT MEMBER	PARTY	NATURE OF COMPLAINT
1.	VK - 23.1.89	Mr. R. R. Ramadas	C. W. C.	No translation in Tamil of documents
2	VK - 13.4.89	-do-	-do-	Condemned Ministry of Education and Cultural Affairs all circulars re New Year Day Celebrations in Sinhala only
3.	VK - 17.10.91	-do-	-do-	Deplored that Tamil is not being implemented as a language of administration, Forms, Name Boards not in Tamil - Local bodies ignoring Tamil. Wanted Chief Minister to stop this.
1.	VK - 13.12.89	Dr. I. M. Illiyas	SLMC	No place for Tamil in Council - all circular, letters in Sinhala. No Tamil speaking G. S. S.
2.	VK - 25.9.89	Dr. I.M.Illiyas	SLMC	Tamil has no place in administration not only in the Council but also in local bodies. Pradeshiya Sabas. No Tamil-speaking officers in offices. Chief Minister Mr. Jayawickrema Perera expressed regret - promised to rectify the situation.
3.	VK - 4.1.90	Dr. I. M. Illiyas	SLMC	No facilities to transact business in Tamil - cannot speak in Tamil as there is no interpreter

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**NORTH WESTERN PROVINCE**

**CENTRAL PROVINCE**

1.	VK - 4.12.89	-	-	After prolonged agitation by Muslim and Tamil members an Interpreter appointed
2.	VK - 21.3.90	Mr. S. Rajee	-	Deplored that land alienation forms were in Sinhala only
3.	VK - 6.4.90	Mr. O. A. Ramiah	U. S. A.	Moved resolution that all facilities should be provided in all Ministries and Depts. for the use of Tamil
4.	VK - 5.6.90	Mr. O. A. Ramiah	U. S. A.	Regretted that nothing was done despite agitation for over an year
5.	VK - 21.3.90	Mr. S. Raju	C. W. C.	Deplored that there was no Tamil interpretation of proceedings of a Conference held at the Queen's Hotel to explain Finance Management.
6.	VK - 22.10.91	Mr. P. V. Kandiah	-	Complaint to HE, the President saying that the Council is not implementing Tamil as official language.
7.	VK - 24.10.91	Mr. V. A. Kandiah Mr. I. M. Atham	-	Complained regarding interpreters and translations not being provided. The Chairman Mr. D. B. Samarasingha said an interpreter has been appointed and tenders called for supply of equipment Tamil not being implemented as language of administration inspite of the Constitutional provision. Chief Minister expressed regret that he was handicapped as suitable qualified persons could not be found despite examinations held for recruitment. He also added that adequate powers have not been devolved and adequate funds not provided.

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## SABARAGAMUWA PROVINCE

VK - 04.01.90	Mr. David Rasiah	U. S. A.	No facility to speak in Tamil - No interpreter - No Tamil typist, stenographer, although there are 5 Tamil speaking members
VK - 20.03.90	Mr. Niyaz A. Majeed		Complained about Tamil-speaking officers not being supplied to Govt. offices - including local bodies. Tamil forms not available - Muslims and Tamils handicapped
VK - 19.09.90	Mr. A. M. D. Rajan		Deplored that no action has been taken to implement Tamil as an administrative language although the Council came into existence 3 years ago
VK - 26.11.91	Mr. David Rasiah Mr. David Rasiah	U. S. A.	Demanded Tamil translation of Bills Budget proposals not supplied in Tamil despite requests made every year and promises made by the Chief Minister.
	Mr. A. William (Opposition Leader)		No provision for interpreter or translations. No Tamil speaking officers. No Tamil Stenographer or Tamil Typewriter. Although the Provincial Councils were introduced to solve the ethnic problem, the language problem has not been solved even in the Council itself

## UVA PROVINCE

1.	VK - 04.09.90	Mr. Dharmasiri Basnayake	SLMP	Appeals to appoint a Tamil officer to Uva Education office, Badulla for the convenience of Tamil Teachers
2.	VK - 17.09.90	Mr. K. Velauthan		Deplores letters sent to Council members and Estate workers in Sinhala. appeals to correspond in Tamil
3.	VK - 22.12.90	Mr. M. Suppiah	Minister	No Interpreter in Tamil in Council
4.	VK - 26.12.90	Mr. Keerthisinghe Ratnayake	U. S. A.	Deplored non-implementation of Tamil as official language and added that the country has come to this pass because Parliament failed to solve the ethnic problem
5.	VK - 31.08.91	Mr. M. Suppiah	Minister	Deplored that Tamil language has not so far been given its due place. Early action urged to use Tamil in administration
6.	TKN - 09.10.91	Mr. K. Velauthan	U. N. P.	Deplored that in spite of repeated requests, documents are not being supplied in Tamil. No interpreters. No translations in Tamil N. B. Mr. K. Velauthan walked out in protest followed by Mr. S. Satchithanatham also of the U. N. P. They were followed by other Opposition members including Sinhalese members

## SOUTHERN PROVINCE

- |    |               |                          |   |
|----|---------------|--------------------------|---|
| 1. | VK - 11.03.90 | Tamil and Muslim Members | Hurt over Governor's policy statement being presented with lots of mistakes in Tamil.   |
| 2. | VK - 05.06.90 |                          | Appeal by Southern Province Peoples Congress to the Chief Minister to remove inconveniences experienced by Muslims because there are no Tamil-speaking officers at many levels.   |
| 3. | VK - 20.08.91 | Mr. M. S. Mohamed Agram  | SLMP<br>No Tamil speaking officers appointed. Forms printed in Tamil have several mistakes. No Tamil-speaking officers even in offices in the principal towns. Tamil graduates not given any appointments. Minorities are being oppressed. Tamil must be given its due place.   |
|    |               | Mr. Dany Hittatige       | U. S. A.<br>Deplored that Tamil graduates not given any appointments in the Southern Province. We must not only appreciate the grievances of the minorities but also grant their rights.  |
| 4. | VK - 05.11.91 | Mr. M. S. Mohamed Agram  | SLMP<br>Regretted that Forms in Tamil continue to have many mistakes. We must think as to what the cause of the LTTE struggle is. Because agitation for language rights was not granted. It has blown into a demand for separation by the LTTE. Until Tamil - speaking officers are appointed one cannot accept that Tamil language has been given its due place. |

Note:- VK - Virakesari: TKN - Thinakaran: DN - Daily News

## ANNEXURE B

### PRADESHYA SABAS

SERIAL NO	SOURCE	NAME OF PRADESHYA SABA	NAME OF COMPLAINT	NATURE OF COMPLAINT
1.	VK - 06.07.91	Bandarawela	Bandarawela Correspondent	All correspondence sent to public by the Pradeshya Sabas. Local bodies, All Govt. offices, and Semi Government Institutions in Sinhala only. Public inconvenienced
2.	VK - 07.08.91	Walapone	K. A. Paramanathan (Member)	Appoint Tamil-speaking officers in all offices
3.	VK - 14.08.91	Uva Province	Bandarawela Correspondent	No interpreters and translations
4.	VK - 28.10.91	Bandarawela	N. S. Sahadevan (Member)	Appeals to Minister of Public Administration, Provincial Councils and Home Affairs Hon. Festus Perera to rectify situation in Uva. No interpreters, translators, typists etc. This appeal was made to the Minister when he visited Badulla
5.	VK 26.11.91	Bandarawela	N. Selvarajan (Member)	Budget proposals not in Tamil - He expressed dissatisfaction. Opposition members also supported him

Note:- VK - Virakesari TKN - Thinakaran

## CHAPTER VIII

### IMPLEMENTATION OF TAMIL AS OFFICIAL LANGUAGE GENERAL ADMINISTRATION

“In our view, it is not granting a language the status of an ‘official’ or ‘national’ one that matters but the real meaning of these terms,” observes Yullan Bromley in the context of the Soviet Union. He adds:

Canada has two official languages (English and French) and according to the Constitution of that polyethnic country both languages have equal status; Finland has two official languages: Finnish and Swedish (although Swedes account for some 6% of the country’s total population) ... Concern about the destinies of one’s ancestral culture and mother-tongue has direct bearing on the climate of ethnic relations.<sup>1</sup>

This passage has direct relevance to our own context. Multi-ethnic Sri Lanka has by its Constitution’s Sixteenth Amendment accommodated Tamil, one of the national languages, as one of the administrative languages. More than the Constitutional status accorded Tamil, what matters is the Constitution’s translation into practice. If adherence of a nation’s action to its founding letters makes for a healthful climate of all relations, including the ethnic, lack of integrity in implementation aids or blockades national progress, directly affecting the trust in the government’s integrity vested both by citizens and other nations.

Among governmental agencies which most directly serve and interact with the public are those of transport services, hospitals, police, post offices, assistant governmental agents, social services, and such departments as that of Inland Revenue. Are they fair by Tamil-speaking citizens?

A visual thermometer of national health and integrity is available. For example, one only infrequently sees a bus bearing a destination board in Tamil. The former Minister of Transport and Highways, Mr. Wijayapala Mendis, issued a statement regarding his order for all destination boards to be in Sinhala and Tamil.<sup>2</sup> To this day, there is no sign of Mendis’ dictum being carried into effect.

Similarly, though hospitals may be meant to serve humanity, signboards are not written in both Sinhala and Tamil. If by some small chance Tamil does appear, it is broken and misspelled, as is the case within Colombo’s Judicial Medical Officer’s Office (cf. Appendix 1). Inside hospitals, directions to wards and crucial services all read in Sinhala.<sup>3</sup>

Even Health Ministry circulars appear only in Sinhala. Surely the Health Ministry can adopt a healthy attitude towards Tamil -speaking visitors to hospitals.

Similarly, though the policeman and postman both are expected to serve citizens, signboards appear only in Sinhala and reveal the disease of chauvinism. In most places outside the North-East, especially in the up-country and South, though the press has complained, there are practically no Tamil-speaking officers.

Anecdotal evidence from the editorial pages of the *Virakesari* demonstrates the consequences of discrimination. As synecdoche for the state of affairs, the Nawala post office refused to cash a money order originally drawn in Tamil at a Trincomalee post office.<sup>4</sup> Nawala postal authorities instructed the solely Tamil-speaking woman that as only Sinhala or English money orders could be cashed, she must return to Trincomalee to inform the authorities. Having entertained her complaint, Trincomalee postal authorities promised to send it to the higher authorities for action. The follow-up remains unknown.

Encountering a similar inhospitality, having received Social Services forms to apply for relief, victims of flood damage in the Eastern Province found the applications to be only in Sinhala.<sup>5</sup>

In spotlighting these two, hardly isolated incidents, the *Virakesari* lamented the manner in which the Sixteenth Amendment was being implemented and advised the authorities to note lapses.<sup>6, 7</sup>

From all corners such a call for implementation had more than sufficient cause to arise. Consider the partiality in Postal Department appointments. Out of eighty new officers appointed in 1989, only one Tamil and one Muslim were selected in a percentage surely disproportionate to the make-up of the general population.<sup>8</sup> In largely Tamil-speaking Batticaloa, out of forty-three Tamil speakers required, only thirty were recruited.<sup>9</sup>

The number of complaints which continue to be entered regarding Kachcheris and AGA Offices outside the North-East reveal an unembarrassed insensitivity to the Sixteenth Amendment. One can only contemplate even the North-East's Amparai, in which the Kachcheri and Education Office gain a notoriety on par with more central institutions.

Though the Public Administration Department sends documents in all three languages, the Inland Revenue Department within its own precincts circulates these same documents in Sinhala only, and only under pressure reluctantly supplies the Tamil version. International institutions such as the Red Cross fall prey to the same misprision of a society's will. Even the signboard of the Sri Lankan Red Cross Society in Amparai<sup>10</sup> and Ratnapura<sup>11</sup> appear only Sinhala.

Such abandonment of pluralism paradoxically often occurs in sites devoted to social justice. Especially in upcountry areas where plaintiffs or parties to cases are often plantation-working Tamils, often not a single Tamil officer is appointed to the relevant Labour Tribunals.<sup>12</sup> In parallel miscreancy, the form supplied by the Labour Department for U.N. relief for those who lost their jobs as a result of the Middle-East war, though designed to help, proved itself an obstacle by appearing not even in English but in Sinhala only.

Direct issues of representation and discrimination come into play. Although an average of over sixty percent of workers in any plantation are Tamils, in its selection of trainees for Estate Management Courses, the State Plantations Corporation selected not a single Muslim or Tamil. In Parliament on August 8th, 1991, Mr. M.H.M. Ashroff criticized this blind policy.<sup>13</sup>

In areas in which sizable pockets of Tamil and Muslim communities live, Sinhalese Grama Seyvekas often prove unsympathetic to their represented communities' requirements.<sup>14</sup> Often such disenfranchised communities have agitated for the creation of additional Tamil divisions<sup>15</sup> and new Tamil AGAA divisions.<sup>16</sup> Meanwhile, an acute need persists for appointments on the local level of Tamil Justices of the Peace<sup>17</sup>, Tamil Registrars of Births<sup>18</sup> and Tamil inquirers into sudden deaths.<sup>19</sup>

In one of the most identity-related issues, we have seen that the Constitution guarantees the right of a Tamil-speaking citizen to the use of her language. However, from the moment of Sri Lankan birth, a child carries the stigma of not having an assured and free access to his mother tongue.

According to K.G. John, the Registration of Births, Marriages and Deaths Ordinance carries an obsolete section, 22 (1), which forbids Tamil-language registration, and which must be brought into line with the nation's master document, its Constitution.<sup>20</sup>

Such discrepancies as Section 22 (1) confuse even those brought in to remedy discrimination. For instance, within the Nuwara Eliya District Registrar's Office, a Tamil officer referred to the prohibitive circular instructions and refused to register a birth in Tamil.<sup>21</sup>

Organisation among communities results from the need to respond to a socially unjust situation. At the 27th Annual General Meeting of Muslim Registrars of Birth, Marriages and Deaths, under Alhaj Moulana H. Salahudeen as President, a unanimous resolution was passed that Muslims should have the right to register births anywhere in Tamil.<sup>22</sup> Similarly, Mr. N.B. Buhardeen, former MP of Galle District, gave notice of a Parliamentary motion which requested the Minister of Public Administration, Home Affairs and Provincial Councils to appoint a Muslim officer to the Matara District Registrar's Office as Muslim residents found that the office's mode of operation quite effectively rendered Tamil irrelevant.<sup>23</sup>

An equivalent relegation of Tamil to the figurative doghouse occurred during a significant interview for selection of students for Management Studies in Kandy: applicants' very birth certificates were rejected for being in Tamil.<sup>24</sup>

Remember that Tamil has, at this late stage, been declared a language of administration. Yet still the fate of qualified officers who have lost jobs for not having acquired proficiency in Sinhala remains unsettled. Mr. U.B. Wijekoon, then Minister of Public Administration, Home Affairs and Provincial Councils, announced that he had sought the advice of the Attorney General on those who suffered disability prior to the declaration of Tamil as an administrative language.<sup>25</sup>

While the Attorney General judges what is essential for national unity and solidarity, he or she should not be made a scapegoat; the Cabinet possesses the power to illuminate past policy blindness.

Eventually, the government announced that those who had suffered from not having acquired proficiency in Sinhala should apply to the Ministry of Public Administration before February 28 of 1990.<sup>26</sup> In

response to this announcement, Mr. M.I. Uduma Lebbe, General Secretary of the Agricultural Extension Officers' Union, wrote to the Ministry of Rehabilitation of the North-East Provincial Council seeking relief for eleven Extension Officers who were dismissed for not acquiring proficiency in Sinhala.<sup>27</sup>

Additionally, Mr. Halim Ishak, MP for Colombo District, gave notice in Parliament of a question regarding these eleven affected Extension officers. At the time of this writing, expectably, no decision had yet been taken.<sup>28</sup>

Further, even those Jaffna officers capable of proving Sinhala proficiency *after* the stipulated threshold exam date suffered the injustice of being confirmed in service from the late date of examination rather than from their earlier date of appointment. Even after Tamil was declared an administrative language, those whose yeoman service had been called unconfirmed for not having acquired Sinhala proficiency remained, in the most telltale of phrasings, all the more unconfirmed.<sup>29</sup>

Seeking to rectify matters, in its print media notice of January 16, 1990, the Ministry of Public Administration solicited details regarding officers affected by the Official Language Act No.33 of 1956.

The second paragraph of this print notice categorically states:

In terms of the existing provisions it is not possible to implement the above amendments to the Constitution with retrospective effect and to grant any relief effective from an earlier date. However, the Government has agreed that some form of relief should be granted to such affected persons after careful evaluation of the number of persons involved and the administrative and financial implications of such relief measures.

In this ad the Ministry made clear that it conducted a survey rather than assurance of recompense; moreover, it wanted particulars to be sent by ordinary post. Given the vagaries of this means of communication, some cases could easily have never reached the Ministry and have entered neither resultant survey nor analysis.

Some eight months later, on August 23, 1991, the government issued in relation to the survey Public Administration Circular No.37/91. For our purposes, the second paragraph proves pertinent:

All obstacles for promotions imposed on above mentioned circulars will be removed from 5th June 1991. Therefore, promotions should be granted to those officers *if they are not otherwise ineligible*. However, such promotions should be given to be effective on a date on or after 5th June 1991.

In other words, those who had suffered discrimination from 1956 until June 5, 1991, were not to be recompensed for personal and professional hardship encountered by the (mis)readings of the law and policy that had taken place under the Sri Lankan Constitution. This disentanglement of a sizable sector makes sense only from the government's pecuniary perspective, and not from its avowed commitment to democracy.

Parts of the Circular which dealt with those prematurely retired or whose services were terminated for non-proficiency in Sinhala says that they will be eligible for reemployment depending on their "discipline, age, experiences, qualifications and efficiency." Note the ideas of *eligibility* and *reemployment* introduced here, which transform the redressing of injustice and entitlement into the question of an officer's suitability. Of the criteria listed, only age has some justification. Here, too, should not the officer discriminated against be reckoned as having been in continuous service with all dues, increments, and promotions granted?

Discipline, experiences, qualifications, and efficiency are criteria which, by their introduction, create a very effective leverage to deny those thrown out of service the right to a redressing of injustice. Had such shortcomings been present in the affected officers, would they not have been dismissed on these accounts rather than due to a lack of Sinhala proficiency? These new riders are legally untenable and only muddy the issue of legitimate, free-standing recompense.

Further, this circular does not empower an affected officer to apply for continuous service. Rather, it abdicates the State's right to the whims and fancies of State officers in stating that affected officers' applications for reemployment should follow a long procedure. First, such application must first be accepted by the Cabinet-appointed Committee of Secretaries and then be recommended by the relevant Ministry. Further, if these officers are reinstated (not reemployed as wrongly termed by the circular) their seniority should not be over anyone in service at that grade. In other words, officers who had been discriminated against by wrongful application of the law must suffer further loss of seniority.



Paragraphs 3(iii) and 3(iv) relating to pension rights and gratuity respectively are applicable only in cases where the officer has reached the age of optional retirement, and not otherwise.

This circular, therefore, disempowers the expediency of justice, adding insult to injury by ushering in new bureaucratic impediments.

Appearing on February 11, 1988, Public Administration Circular No.5/88 does stipulate the payment of a bonus of Rs.500/- for those who complete a course of Tamil/Sinhala/English (depending on what languages are not the employee's mother tongue) conducted by the Official Languages Department or the Sri Lanka Institute of Development Administration. At this writing, this scheme has been withdrawn; a new scheme where an officer has to sit graded examinations in Sinhala/Tamil/English has been put into effect as ordered by Public Administration Circular No.38/89 of July 31, 1989.

(This Graded Examination scheme has been published in Government Gazette of October 26, 1990, Part I, Sec.(IIA), pages 1056-1061. This Circular is further clarified by Public Administration Circular No.38/89(i) of March 22, 1990.)

Paragraph 4 of Public Administration Circular No.38/89 of July 31, 1989 states that "officers who obtain prescribed language proficiency before or after this scheme comes into operation will be eligible for the above incentives." Even this plainly omits a number of officers already in service with substantial seniority who are bilingual and trilingual and have passed different examinations at different times. The new scheme can be confined to new recruits and those who had not acquired stipulated proficiency in Sinhala at the time the Sixteenth Amendment to the Constitution (making Tamil also one of the Official Languages) was passed. Far better it would have been for the government to provide incentives and make use of resources available within the service rather than delaying implementation once again until new recruits become proficient in all three languages.

Clause 2(iv) of the Public Administration Circular No.38/89(i) of March 22, 1990, says:

Incentive payments will not be made to an Officer, for a language, up to the level of the certificate used to get exemption from second language requirement or language proficiency requirements. For example, if an officer has forwarded a

G.C.E.(O/L) English language Certificate, to get such an exemption he is not entitled to incentives even though he may have had a credit pass or distinction.

The Ministry's vagueness here makes it difficult for one to understand its message. One wonders whether the Government possesses good faith in its concern with language skills promotion. For example, say that an officer enters Public Service in either the Sinhala or Tamil medium. The other language, Tamil or Sinhala, as the case may be, qualifies as the second language; English as the third. It is difficult to understand the reasoning behind denial of incentive bonus to one who secures a Credit/Distinction pass in English at the G.C.E.(O/L) examination.

If language skills are to be earnestly promoted, such unnecessary hindrances must be reconsidered. While such hindrances fall into the category of bureaucratic proliferation, even more insidious discriminatory practices exist which affect a growing child's national enfranchisement.

Consider the practice of singing the National Anthem in Sinhala only. Even the Tamil programs of the SLBC and SLRC use only the Sinhala version of the National Anthem. Some education authorities, as in Bandarawela, insist that even in Tamil schools, the National Anthem must be sung in Sinhala only.<sup>30</sup> *Virakesari* lamented this marginalisation of a national language.<sup>31</sup> What more symbolically efficient way could a nation find to alienate a sizable community of citizens?

While many Ministers of prior regimes have promised to implement Tamil as a language of administration, they have unfailingly mentioned the lack of resources available to them: i.e., Tamil officers, Tamil stenographers, translators, and typists. Mr. P.P. Devaraj, former Minister of State for Hindu Religious and Cultural Affairs, has offered some sensible ways and means. Having studied the application of Canadian language laws, he submitted a scheme based on the Canadian experience.<sup>32</sup> During a conference on September 28, 1989, at Thurstan College, Devaraj offered to establish a Tamil typists and Tamil translators pool in his office and help in the implementation process, but his suggestion remains, at this writing, unheeded.<sup>33</sup>

We can see the road to good intentions has been paved somewhat hellish. The Secretary to the Ministry of Public Administration, by his Circular No.22/91 dated 17th June 1991, instructed all Ministry Secretaries, Heads

of Departments and Corporations that forms should appear in all three languages. He ordered mono- or bilingual forms to be withdrawn and substituted with trilingual forms. Today one still all too rarely finds forms in Sinhala and Tamil and even more rarely in the recommended trilinguality.

On October 12, 1989, at a meeting presided over by the Minister of Public Administration at Savsiripaya to examine linguistic questions, a Committee of Secretaries of all Ministries and Heads of Departments was appointed to work out a scheme.<sup>34</sup> But once again, the root rots; such a Committee's efficacy is limited unless a full resource pool becomes available. Until Tamil translators, stenographers and typists are trained, recruited and appointed, we will be doomed to the eternal recurrence of committees, conferences, reports and eye-wash.

In the earlier regime, the Director of Combined Services called for particulars of positions available to Tamil typists from all Ministries and Heads of Departments, but only a few responded.<sup>35</sup> In 1989, reported vacancies totaled 27; in 1990, 25.<sup>36</sup> Though the situation of equal linguistic representation has not improved, the perceived need for it may have diminished.

We can investigate only one procedure to see a document of this decrease. Fresh appointments must have the permission of the Ministry of Planning and Plan Implementation. In 1989 only the Agricultural Insurance Board applied for and obtained permission to appoint Tamil typists. Many times *Virakesari* posed the question as to what other Departments were doing.<sup>37, 38</sup> Mr.M.S.Sellamy, former Minister of State for Industries, quite rightly criticised this bureaucratic lethargy.<sup>39</sup>

A fresh calculation of possible vacancies for Tamil typists on the number of AGAA offices in the country, Provincial Councils and other departments offered the rough figure of at least five hundred.<sup>40</sup> Recently, the Public Administration Department itself appointed seventy-five stenographers out of which forty-nine were for Sinhala, twenty-four for English, and only two for Tamil. <sup>41</sup> Given such applied disproportionality, how could the Public Administration Department plan to implement Tamil as a language of administration?

On March 24, 1990, different districts held examinations for Tamil typists; on April 1, 1990, Colombo held exams for Tamil stenographers. The results had, at this writing, not yet been released.

If we look at the source for such Tamil proficiency, we find the situation should be promising. Every year the Technical Colleges in Kokuvil and Sammanturai produce hundreds of qualified Tamil stenographers and typists, both Tamils and Muslims.<sup>42</sup> The National Apprentice Board also annually trains Tamil typists and stenographers.

We can now reevaluate the retreat which many politicians and administrators have found so comfortable: that Tamil stenographers and typists are not available. Beyond the evidence of trained graduates appearing in abundance, administrations could also emphasize the reemployment of qualified retirees capable of Tamil translators, while a steady system of competitive exams could be created in order to select new translators.

If the government employed the mailing of pension vouchers to solicit retirees to reenroll as English teachers, why cannot it show the same initiative and determination in its policy toward Tamil?

The former Minister of Public Administration, Festus Perera, observed:

. . . [that] among various measures that could be taken to develop goodwill, the chief step lies in providing the people, without discrimination, the equal right, liberty and privileges in the use and development of their languages. It is with this objective in view the new Language Law was passed.<sup>43</sup>

He further said that Canada had endowed Sri Lanka with 52 million rupees for the language project. If the Government would be committed to use not only Canadian money but also Canadian advice, then the implementation of Tamil as an administrative language will both be a success in itself and a harbinger of the ethnic crisis' settlement.

Former President Premadasa sent a directive to the Chief Minister of Central Province, Provincial Council that all correspondence with the Tamil-speaking public should possess attendant or singular Tamil translations.<sup>44</sup>

Further, addressing UNP Heads of Local Bodies, Premadasa exhorted them:

. . . [to] remember to fall in line with the government language policy too. Sinhala and Tamil are the official languages and

English is the link language. Use both Sinhala and Tamil in all communications. Don't think of not using Tamil because there are only two or three families in your area. Use all three languages if possible. . . All citizens in this country belonging to all communities big and small are entitled to the same rights and same justice.<sup>45</sup>

To take the bird's-eye view of history, we see how such similar appeals were made more than thirty years ago. Sam P.C. Fernando, then Minister of Justice under whom language implementation fell, said as early as 1961:

I would myself consider it absurd if, particularly in Tamil-speaking areas, prescribed forms, which the public are [sic] required to fill in, were only in the Sinhala language. I have already directed that such forms should be in all three languages.<sup>46</sup>

In 1964, then-Acting Minister of Finance Mr.T.B.Illangaratne directed as follows:

While implementing Sinhala as the Official language, it is the policy of Government to give the Tamil language its due place. Therefore, please make it known that this transition should proceed without resort to extremism of any kind and *without damage to the self-respect of our citizens*. Please appeal to Public Servants to bear this well in mind.<sup>47</sup>

Thirty years later, when one observes governmental practice, one realizes that mid-level bureaucrats have not heeded directives arising both from the grassroots level and descending from the Parliament. A delusive isolation from citizens' needs proves to be the norm at the government's muscle, its bureaucracy. Further, while in the past, press reports on governmental lapses were taken with the utmost seriousness and were promptly remedied, today we find that the non-implementation of Tamil as an administrative language continues despite repeated press attention.

## NOTES

Bromley, Yullan, "Ethnic Problems and Perestroika", **Social Sciences** Vol.XXI No.1, 1990 (Ed.V.V.Segrin), USSR Academy of Sciences. pp.29, 30.

- 2 Virakesari, 5.11.91, 19.11.91  
Thinakaran, 20.11.91.
- 3 Ranjan Xavier, Virakesari, 3.10.91
- 4 Virakesari, 5.9.91
- 5 Virakesari, 13.8.91
- 6 Virakesari, 13.8.91
- 7 Virakesari, 14.08.91
- 8 Azwer, AHM, M.P. Complained to Minister of Posts & Telecommunications - Virakesari - 30.12.89
- 9 Joseph, Pararajasingham, M.P. complains to Postmaster-General. Virakesari, 18.3.91
- 10 Virakesari, 30.10.91
- 11 Virakesari, 22.11.91
- 12 Virakesari, 7.11.90
- 13 Virakesari, 9.8.91; 16.11.90
- 14 Virakesari, 6.5.89 - Gampola area for example.
- 15 Kusalai, Andimunai in Puttalam Dt. - Virakesari, 24.1.89, 27.2.89  
Matugama in Kalutara Dt. - Virakesari, 26.12.90; Up-country areas - 26.1.89
- 16 Buhardeen, N.M. - Galle Dist. M.P. wrote to Minister of Public Administration to create a New AGA (Tamil) Division in Nankadawa area in Galle and also Tamil-speaking GSS & Registrars of Births, Marriages and deaths - Virakesari, 14.12.90
- 17 Virakesari Editorial, 12.12.88; 23.5.89.
- 18 Virakesari, 26.1.89; 14.12.90; 26.12.90; 3.8.91

- 19 Virakesari Editorial, 12.12.88 - op.cit.
- 20 Virakesari, 27.10.89
- 21 Virakesari, 6.12.90
- 22 Virakesari, 13.11.89
- 23 Virakesari, 3.11.90
- 24 Yasotharan, R. Virakesari, 8.11.91
- 25 Virakesari, 14.10.89
- 26 Virakesari, 19.1.1990
- 27 Virakesari, 12.9.89
- 28 Virakesari, 8.5.91
- 29 Virakesari, 19.5.1990
- 30 Virakesari, 24.10.1991
- 31 Virakesari, 17.08.89
- 32 Virakesari, 2.8.89
- 33 Virakesari, 29.9.89
- 34 Virakesari, 17.10.89
- 35 Thinakaran, 12.10.91
- 36 Thinakaran, 26.10.91
- 37 Virakesari, 26.9.89
- 38 Virakesari, 25.4.89 - 4.6.90
- 39 Virakesari, 19.10.91

- 40 Virakesari, 19.11.91
- 41 Virakesari, 5.10.91
- 42 Thirunavukkarasu, K., Virakesari, 16.11.91
- 43 Perera, Festus, M.P., Observer, 23.10.91
- 44 Virakesari, 6.4.1991
- 45 Daily News, 3.6.1991
- 46 Ceylon News Letter, 2nd Feb.1961
- 47 Treasury Circular Letter No.7(2/9/156/16 (H)) of 29.3.1964.

**ANNEXURE A**  
**Non availability of Tamil-speaking staff**

SERIAL NO.	SOURCE	NAME OF COMPLAINANT	POSITION	PLACE WHERE STAFF-NEEDED	NATURE OF CONTENTS
1.	VK 16.01.89	Correspondent	-	Amparai	No place for Tamil in the Secretariat - No Tamil forms or staff
2.	VK 11.03.89	Pottuvil Correspondent	-	Amparai	All business in Sinhala only at the Kachcheri - No Tamil staff - Tamils suffering
3.	VK 20.04.89 10.5.89	Correspondents	-	N - E	Education Ministry circulars and letters of appointments in Sinhala only
4.	VK 13.05.89	Deraniyagala	-	Deraniyagala	Letters to public from Labour Dept. and Registrar-General's Office in Sinhala only Tamil-speaking public in difficulty
5.	VK 20.05.89	All Ceylon Muslim Education Congress	-	General	Passed Resolution calling for all circulars to Tamil medium schools to be in Tamil, Circulars in Sinhala deployed
6.	VK 01.06.89	S. P. Fernando	Letter to Editor	Electricity Board	Name Boards not in Tamil - No Tamil speaking officer - at Reception Counter - Tamil abandoned in Calendar during last two years
7.	VK 13.06.89	Mr. M. S. Sellasamy	Minister of State	Hatton	At a visit to the Hatton CTB stand - Name board re drinking water in Sinhala only - ordered the Tamil version to be written immediately
8.	VK 21.07.89	L. Lingeswaran	Letter	Madurankuli	Destination Boards on SLTB buses not in Tamil
9.	VK 01.08.89	Janab A. H. M. Azwer	Hon. Minister of State	Badulla district	Notice of question given in Parliament reappointment of Tamil-speaking officers to Post Office in Badulla District
10.	VK 05.08.89	Editorial	-	-	Quoting news that G. A. Colombo and Commissioner of Labour have sent letters in Sinhala only even to Mr. M. S. Sellasamy a Minister of State deployed this unhealthy trend.
11.	VK 18.09.89	Senkadagalla Cor.	-	Kandy Post Office	Residents request that the name-board be displayed in Tamil also
12.	VK 27.10.89	K. G. John	Letter	General	Under section 22(1) of Registration of Birth Ordinance one outside N - E unable to register a birth in Tamil - suggests amendment of the law
13.	VK 04.12.89	S. Govindaraj	CWC Organiser Western Province	National Savings Bank Colombo	Insufficient Tamil-speaking staff at Head office and Branches - appeal to Hon. S. Thondaman to get this situation rectified.
14.	VK 06.12.89	Mr. Mavai Senathirajah	M. P.	General	Complaint in Parliament on 5.12.89. Although Tamil is declared an official language it is not so in practice
15.	VK 09.12.89	Mr. Hisbullah	M. P.	(Youth Service Institutions)	In Youth Service Institutions only Sinhala is being used - Tamil also must be used - complaint in Parliament on 8.12.89
16.	VK 27.12.89	Correspondent	-	Gampaha	National Housing Development Authority Forms and Guidelines in Sinhala only - Tamil - Speaking public inconvenienced - although Tamil is also an official language

17.	VK 30.12.89	Correspondent	News	General	Hon. A. H. M. Azwer complains to Hon. Minister of Posts & Telecommunications re recent appointments-out of 80 only 1 Tamil and Muslim
18.	VK 30.12.89	Editorial			Lamenis ethnically disproportionate appointments to Public Service - it will not help implement Tamil as official language
19.	VK 16.01.90	Correspondent	News	Deraniyagala AGA's Office	State Minister for Rehabilitation appeals to Hon. Minister of Home Affairs to appoint a Tamil Officer at Deraniyagala AGA's office - concentration of Tamils in the area
20.	VK 11.05.90	Deraniyagala Correspondent	News	Deraniyagala	Since there are no Tamil officers - Tamil - speaking public suffering. Tamil erased from name - boards despite protests
21.	VK 19.05.90	Badulla Correspondent	News	Uva Province	Hon. S. Thondaman wrote to Hon. Minister of Posts and Telecommunications to appoint Tamil officers to all Post Offices Uva Province
22.	VK 31.05.90	Deraniyagala Correspondent	News	Deraniyagala	No Tamil officers in the Banks - Bank of Ceylon. People's Bank and Rural Banks - Tamil-speaking public inconvenienced
23.	VK 13.07.90	Matarara Correspondent	News	Galle & Matara	No Tamil officers in Post Offices in Galle and Matara. Tamil and Muslim public inconvenienced. Chief Postmaster says he is helpless
24.	VK 14.07.90	Correspondent	News	Talawakelle	Hon. S. Thondaman appeals to Regional Manager, People's Bank to appoint Tamil officer to Talawakelle Branch as 8.5% residents are Tamil speaking

25.	VK 30.07.90	Correspondent	News	Nuwara-Eliya	CWC Regional Director writes to Hon. S. Thondaman to see that Tamil officers are appointed in all the offices in Nuwara-Eliya District. Tamil-speaking public unable to transact business in Govt. offices
26.	VK 24.08.90	Kandy Correspondent	News	Kandy Post - Office	Kandy Y M H A appeals to Postal authorities to appoint additional Tamil officers to work in the evening shift since even obituary notices in Tamil are not accepted
27.	VK 07.11.90	Kandy Correspondent	News	Kandy Labour Tribunal	Trade Unions appeal for the appointment of a Tamil officer
28.	VK 07.12.90	Correspondent	News	Amparai Dist.	Complaint by Eastern Ibrahim, Secretary. East Coastal Farmers Federation of Amparai to His Excellency the President that Tamil has no place in the Administration in Amparai. Tamil and Muslim names written wrongly in Sinhala
29.	VK 18.03.91	Correspondent	News	Uva Province	282 Post Offices in the Province but no Tamil-speaking officers - Tamil - speaking public greatly handicapped
30.	VK 21.03.91	Ratnapura Correspondent	News	Uva Province	Peoplised buses do not have destination boards in Tamil
31.	VK 23.03.91	Maskeliya Correspondent			-do-
32.	VK 26.03.90	Avissawella Correspondent			Peoplised buses do not have destination boards in Tamil

33.	VK 29.08.91	Bandarawela Correspondent	-	-	Peopled buses do not have destination boards in Tamil in Bandarawela
34.	VK 13.08.91	Kandy Correspondent	-	-	Tamil has no place in the Government offices in Kandy
35.	VK 13.08.91	Correspondent	-	-	No Tamil - speaking officer at the Badulla Branch of the National Savings Bank-customers inconvenienced
36.	VK 13.08.91	Bandarawela Correspondent	-	-	No place for Tamil in the Post Offices at Bandarawela, Badulla, Haputale and Welimade Post Offices
37.	VK 25.07.91	Bandarawela Correspondent	-	-	Invitations in connection with occasion for supply of electricity at Gahagolle Estate in Sinhala only
38.	VK 20.07.91	Bandarawela Correspondent	-	-	Customers request appointment of Tamil speaking officer to People's Bank, Haputale Branch - they are inconvenienced
39.	VK 28.11.91	Matugama Correspondent	-	-	All advertisements in connection with Mobile Services in Sinhala only - over 30,000 Tamils in Kalutara District
40.	VK 25.07.91	Bandarawela Correspondent	-	Badulla	Mobile service of Industries Ministry held at Badulla - No place for Tamil even in advertisement
41.	VK17.08.91	Correspondent	-	-	At Badulla Presidential Mobile Service - Minister Athulathmudali observed that no place was given to Tamil in his Ministry. Angered at it, he immediately got it rectified.
42.	VK 16.07.91	Correspondent	-	-	Telegram to Chief Justice to advertise in Sinhala and Tamil also the advertisement published in English calling for applications for posts of lecturers at the Law College

43.	VK 26.06.91	Correspondent			Alhaj N. M. Buhardeen M. P. gives notice in Parliament requesting appointment of a Tamil-speaking officer at the Biyagama A. G. A.'s office in Gampaha dist. where there is a concentration of Tamil speaking public
44.	VK 05.09.91	Matara Correspondent			Residents of Galle appeal to authorities to appoint a Tamil - speaking officer to the Galle Post Office as even obituary notices are not being accepted in Tamil
45.	VK 16.01.90	Deraniyagala Correspondent			Kegalle Dist. M. P. and State Minister for Rehabilitation Mr. Vincent Perera appealed to Minister of Home Affairs to appoint Tamil-speaking officers at Deraniyagala AGA's office as there is a concentration of Tamils in the area

**ANNEXURE ' B  
Non-availability of Forms in Tamil**

SERIAL NO.	SOURCE	NAME OF COMPLAINANT	POSITION	PLACE WHERE FORMS NEEDED	NATURE OF FORMS
1.	VK 14.10.89	Vavuniya Correspondent	News	Vavuniya	Public Assistance Forms not available in Tamil - only in Sinhala
2.	VK 26.03.91	Correspondent	News	Colombo	At the District Registrar's Office at Maltigawatta - No Tamil Forms
3.	VK 19.08.91	Correspondent	News	Colombo	Insurance Forms not available in Tamil - Forms to insure students sent to a leading Tamil school in Colombo in Sinhala only



## CHAPTER IX

### EDUCATION

Education is directly linked to the implementation of Tamil as an official language. As implementation is a continuous process, those competent in the Tamil language have to be produced by schools in a continuous manner.

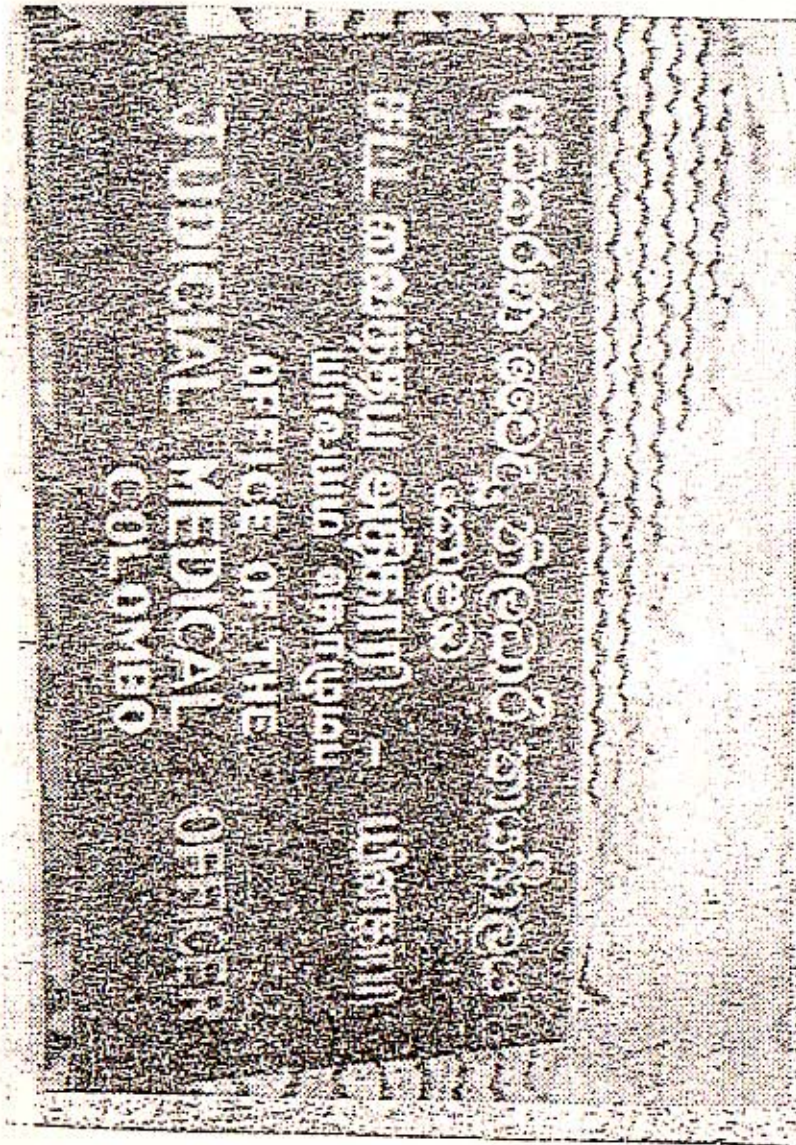
A spate of complaints indicate that all is not well in the state of Tamil medium schools, including both Tamil and Muslim schools. A perusal of Annexures 'A' and 'B' will bear testimony to this appraisal.

We might refer especially to some instances which reveal the denigration of Tamil medium education. The most affected are, predictably if all the more unjustly, plantation-area Tamil and Muslim students. As the Provincial Council system now oversees educational issues, an allegation circulates at this writing that Provincial Councils are adopting a step-motherly attitude towards Tamil Medium schools.

Even in the North-Eastern province, graduates suffer. At this writing, the island possesses eight thousand unemployed graduates.<sup>1</sup> Out of this population, 350 unemployed graduate-trainees are in the North-Eastern Province.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, according to Provincial Education Ministry sources, the North-Eastern Province lacks an additional 4179 teachers.<sup>3</sup> From this 4179, 1472 vacancies are reported from Batticaloa District alone,<sup>4</sup> where 59 schools lack permanent Principals.<sup>5</sup> Could not the North-East's 350 unemployed graduate trainees be easily absorbed into the permanent teachers cadre?

In the Matale District, 152 fewer teachers than are required are currently employed, and this proves a phenomenon not isolated to a single district.<sup>6</sup> *Virakesari's* editorials have repeatedly commented on the islandwide shortage of Tamil teachers and lamented this aggravated situation.<sup>7</sup>

David Rasiah, former Member of the Sabaragamuwa Provincial Council, brought to the notice of the Provincial Education Minister that in the Kegalle District, vacancies for 206 Tamil teachers existed. Rasiah also criticized the indifference shown to Muslim schools. He was supported by another member, Janab Niyas A.Cader.<sup>8</sup> In the interim, no primary school teachers have been appointed in Sabaragamuwa.





Kegalle District proves pertinent for other reasons. Due to a politico's intervention, forty Tamil teaching appointments were suspended. Minister Thondaman was informed of this misplay.<sup>9</sup> When Deraniyagala's A.G.A. Division ignored fourteen qualified Tamil teachers during its interview process, Thondaman intervened and eleven were called for interview.<sup>10</sup>

Shortage of teachers reveals the shortage at higher levels of administration. Even in the Sri Lanka Education Administrative Service (SLEAS), Tamils and Muslims are not adequately represented. Five Tamil Members of Parliament made a joint complaint to the Ministry of Education: in Grade I of the SLEAS, out of sixty in the cadre, there are only three Tamils and one Plantation Tamil<sup>11</sup> with no Muslims employed. This composition means that 5% Sri Lankan Tamils and 1.333% Plantation Tamils are employed. The percentage, while obviously a distortion of national percentages, remains similarly low in other grades.

Uva Province fares no better than Kegalle. *Virakesari's* editorials expressed concern about Uva's deterioration and requested authorities to improve the situation.<sup>12</sup>

At the uppermost level which unfortunately often enough is the final marker of a pupil's success, the Department of Examinations is reported to have been unmindful of the requirements of Tamil-speaking candidates. For example, on August 11, 1990, at the Grade 5 Scholarship Examination held at the Nawalapitiya Centre at which a majority of Tamil-speaking students were registered, no Tamil-speaking questioners were present and all announcements were in Sinhala only.<sup>13</sup>

The nation's gatekeepers undergo similar neglect. An examination was held to select Authorized Officers for the Department of Immigration and Emigration. In the Government Gazette, Part II of June 18, 1990, the notification regarding this examination stated that it would be held in Tamil also. However, when Tamil-speaking candidates arrived at the Examination Hall, they found the question papers to be only in Sinhala and English. As there were no question papers in Tamil, Tamil-speaking questioners and examinees both were rendered helpless to administer and take the exam.<sup>14</sup> At Cloden Estate's G.C.E. (O Level) Examination Centre in December 1990, with no Tamil-speaking questioners appointed, students had more than a difficult experience.<sup>15</sup>

Moving from plantation-area education to more centralised agencies such as the Education Department, we note the frequency with which, when

the Department does orchestrate events in Tamil Medium schools, Tamil is not given its due place. On January 22, 1990, at the function organised at the Bandarawela M.M.V. to commence the eleventh distribution of free books by President Premadasa, all programmes were only in Sinhala; even the cultural programs at this event were not in Tamil.<sup>16</sup>

From October 15 to 21, 1990, the Education Department held the Education Development Week at Matugama Ananda Sastralaya. There are 170 area schools of which twenty-five are Tamil or Muslim schools. Not only was no circular regarding this function issued in Tamil; not only did no Tamil teacher play a role in any of the organising Committee; but no announcement ever appeared in Tamil, leaving an entire population once again greatly disappointed.<sup>17</sup>

Besides such collective disappointment, essential notices regarding education can fail to be communicated. At the Wattala Tamil Vidyalaya, all records of students, all letters to parents, including all scouting and insurance instructions, appear in Sinhala only.<sup>18</sup>

Linguistic discrimination easily physicalises itself into physical neglect; an entire community's needs can be willed to be absent, ignorable. For example, the reputed Mannampitiya Tamil school, established in 1892, has only fourteen teachers for three hundred students who must suffer a further indignity in sharing a single toilet.<sup>19</sup> Residents of Alawattugoda in the Harispathuwa Electorate appealed to A.C.S. Hameed, then Minister of Justice and Higher Education, to establish a Tamil school.<sup>20</sup> Though Hameed gave two and a half lakhs of rupees and a single acre of land, the Education Department had done nothing after the lapse of at least a month.<sup>21</sup> Residents are forced to conduct a small Grade 1 to 5 school in the Muthumari Amman Temple premises; though there are two volunteer teachers for seventy-five students, these students will not be able to enter Grade 6 at another school. Why? They will lack formal recognition of this grassroots rectification of governmental lapse.<sup>22</sup>

This slippage of Tamil education between regulatory cracks is no infrequent phenomenon, and in its consequences replicates governmental equivocation on the linguistic issue. Consider that between Koslanda and Wellawaya there reside over one thousand Tamil-speaking students. Lacking a Tamil Medium school, these students are forced to study in Sinhala.<sup>23</sup> What more reprehensible way can a State enforce discriminatory policy than by a smooth-talking and hence benign-seeming neglect?



When two wings of local or central government possess different agendas and fail to work together, the best of plans—representing the aspirations of child, well-meaning teacher, administrator and bureaucrat—can fall by the wayside. A request to establish a Tamil school at Ovilikanda in Matale District has been on the books for years. Yet students from Ankumbura, Uggala-Ovilikanda, Enasalmada, Udawatta, Hettipola, areas have no governmental support for their education. Residents run a private school at the Sri Balasubramania Temple premises, with the dismal teacher to student ration of three volunteer teachers to about 140 students.

In 1989 the Matale District Development Council voted 518,725 rupees for a school's construction in this area. Unfortunately, the State Plantations Corporation failed to donate land for this purpose, and the project had to be abandoned. After continued agitation by those concerned, the authorities have, at this writing, agreed to offer a bit of land.<sup>24</sup>

Plantation Tamil children in the South are not given opportunities to study in Tamil.<sup>25</sup> At the Child Care Centres run by the Janatha Estates Development Board, as in Ukkuwela, only Sinhalese-speaking girls are appointed to look after the children. Though one finds no shortage of unemployed if educated Tamil-speaking girls, they are not appointed.<sup>26</sup> This discrimination controverts one of the most accepted principles of mother-tongue education: that, say, Tamil-speaking children should not be forced to have their basic education in Sinhala. In the interest of cultural preservation, as the majority of these children are Tamils, Tamil teachers should be appointed.

Where are these Tamil teachers? One case might suffice. On October 11 and 12, 1991, Tamil applicants for admission to Hatton, Batane Sri Pada College for Teachers were not summoned for interviews. Consequently, then-State Minister of Education Mrs. R. Pulendran ordered an inquiry.<sup>27</sup>

Where are the Tamil schools? In the bitter year of 1983, in Chilaw District, an attempt to close down a Tamil school called Egodawela Tamil Vidyalay was made. In 1987, the government successfully managed to "close" the school, only for it to be immediately reinstated as a Sinhala Medium school. Education Officers withdrew Tamil books issued to students and, to 220 Grade I students, distributed instead Sinhala books. At this writing, this was only the most recent of a series of unconscionable attempted school "conversions" in this region since 1956. Reports abound of attempts to "close down" Tamil schools at Thoppu, Munnakkarai, Beach

Road, Manatchenai and Thuwanai in the Negombo District. Allegations continue that Tamil schools are purposely understaffed while Muslim schools are overstaffed with Tamil teachers.<sup>28</sup>

On close examination, we find the state of Muslim schools to be equally appalling. During a Southern Provincial Council meeting, Member Janab M.M. Razik revealed that though there are thirty-three Southern Provincial Muslim schools, during the preceding ten years no Southern Muslim student has entered universities for Science, Maths or Commerce courses. Further, in addition to a general lack of qualified teachers, there is only one girls' school in Galle and one in Weligama. At Matara and Hambantota each, a girls' school is required.

Sarath Gunawardena, another member, supported Janab Razik, adding that affluent Muslim students could choose to attend Mawanella and Kalmunai schools while poorer children suffered. Gunawardena also charged that the government conveniently forgets estate Tamil schools during the appointment of teachers, leaving most estate schools understaffed.<sup>29</sup>

Janab Razik expressed the same sentiments when he declared open the Science Laboratory at the Horagoda Muslim Maha Vidyalaya in Matara District for which he gave 85,000 rupees from funds allocated to him. Razik lamented that Muslim schools suffered from a lack of buildings, furniture, science equipment and other amenities.<sup>30</sup> Lacking facilities to study in Tamil in the vicinity of their residence, Muslim students are compelled to study in Sinhala. Further, even students so educated were being admitted to Kalutara District Sinhala schools only on a percentage basis.<sup>31</sup> In the leading schools in Kandy, Muslim students are being pressurised to study Buddhism as their subject for the Religion course.<sup>32</sup>

In Deniyaya, one teacher at volunteer- and parent-run St. Matthew's Tamil School teaches three hundred Grade I through 10 students.<sup>33</sup>

While the Education Service Commission's Development Division published a book of guidelines in Tamil for new teachers, its twenty-eight pages bear 1,500 mistakes, as the Sri Lanka Tamil Teachers' Union's General Secretary informed the Commission.<sup>34</sup>

Consider the rhetoric surrounding the appointment of Tamil teachers to estate schools in the Western Province's Kalutara District. While all other concerned Provincial Councils appointed teachers in July, 1991, the Western

Province Education Ministry gave appointments only in October, 1991. According to the affected parties, the delay stemmed from the Western Province Education Ministry being ignorant of the existence of estates and estate schools in its governed province.

This ignorance typifies the negligence with which education authorities, ministries and departments handle Tamil medium education outside the North-East Province. Former Central Province Chief Minister P.B. Dissanaike stated the relevance of education in Tamil to the implementation of Tamil as a language of administration:

The right to the use of the Tamil language is a fundamental right of the Tamils. We are endeavouring to implement the use of Tamil in our Council. I admit that practical difficulties have arisen because we do not have officers conversant in Sinhala and Tamil. An examination was held to select Tamil officers for appointment to local bodies. There was no one who qualified. Only those with four credit passes at the G.C.E.(O/L) could apply for this examination. At the examination held for this selection, no one was qualified to be selected.<sup>35</sup>

With this lack of qualified Tamil-medium graduates, it should prove no wonder that M.S. Sellasamy complained, during a meeting of the Western Province Tamil School Federation of SDSS, that the Colombo Education office is unable to implement Tamil as an official language because there are no Tamil translators, stenographers and typists.<sup>36</sup>

#### NOTES

- 1 Sunday Times, 8.12.91
- 2 Virakesari, 26.11.91
- 3 Virakesari, 22.10.91
- 4 Virakesari, 26.11.91
- 5 Virakesari, 6. 8. 91
- 6 Virakesari, 9. 4.91

- 7 Virakesari, 11. 3.88, 7. 4.88
- 8 Virakesari, 22. 1.90
- 9 Virakesari, 6. 1.90
- 10 Virakesari, 2. 1.90
- 11 Virakesari, 13.12.90
- 12 Virakesari, Editorial, 18.10.90, 13.12.90
- 13 Virakesari, 15.8.90
- 14 Virakesari, 27. 9.90
- 15 Virakesari, 14.12.90
- 16 Virakesari, 23. 1.90
- 17 Virakesari, 27.10.90
- 18 Virakesari, 27.10.90
- 19 Virakesari, 4. 4.89
- 20 Virakesari, 24. 3.89
- 21 Virakesari, 5.11.90
- 22 Ibid
- 23 Nithiananthan, Mrs.Jothy, Virakesari, 18.12.90
- 24 Virakesari, 26.11.91
- 25 Rajah, V.S., Letter to Hon.M.S.M.Aboosali, Hon.Minister in charge., Virakesari, 6.11.91
- 26 Virakesari, 5.10.88
- 27 Virakesari, 8.11.91

28	Vaikasi Visakan, Virakesari, 13.3.89
29	Virakesari, 4. 1.90
30	Thinakaran, 23.10.91
31	Thinakaran, 30.10.91
32	Nesan, Oct. - Nov.1991
33	Thinakaran, 16.10.91
34	Mahasivam, T., Virakesari, 6.10.91
35	Dissanaike, P.B., Virakesari, 24.10.91
36	Sellasamy, Hon.M.S.Virakesari, 3.11.90

**ANNEXURE A**  
**Education - Staff Shortage & Schools Shortage**

SERIAL NO.	SOURCE	NAME OF COMPLAINT	POSITION	NAME OF SCHOOL OR AREA	NATURE OF COMPLAINT
1.	VK 04.10.88	Mr. David Rasiyah Sabaragamuwa P. C.	Provincial Councillor	Sabaragamuwa	No facilities for A/L classes in Tamil schools - 68 schools in all - only 6 with O/L. 4 of them Muslim schools - 2 Tamil. Whole of Kegalle Town only 2 Tamil Vidyalyas - Both Muslim
2.	VK 13.10.88	Mr. Abdul Carder	Western Province Provincial Councillor	Western Province	No full - fledged Tamil medium M. V. Muslim students going to Mawanella. Kalmunai areas
3.	VK 20.10.88	Correspondent	-	Batticaloa	Letters of appointment to teachers in Sinhala only - No Tamil speaking staff
4.	VK 22.10.88	Mr. S. Satchithanathan	Provincial Councillor, Uva	Diyatalawa	Need for a Tamil Primary school
5.	VK 25.10.88	Mr. M. Suppiah	Minister - Uva Pro. Council	Badulla/Bandarawela	Need for a Tamil Maha Vidyalaya for the benefit of Tamil students
6.	VK 02.11.88	V. Rajasakar	Public - Letter to Editor	Amparai	Only 1 Tamil school classes up to Gr. 11 - only 6 teachers. Education badly affected
7.	VK 28.11.88	Nalini	Public - Letter to Editor	Bandarawela	No Tamil speaking officer in Education office

8.	VK 07.01.89	Correspondent	-	Mullaitivu	Principals of Mullaitivu Dt. complain that Pupil's Record Sheet sent in Sinhala only
9.	VK 17.01.89	-do-	-	Kotagalla Derrick Clair Tamil School	Only 2 teachers for 150 students
10.	VK 19.01.89	T. Damiappillai	Public - Letter to Editor	Navatkadu Tamil Vid. (Puttalam Dt.)	Only 2 teachers - Principal and a Trained teacher and 2 volunteers
11.	VK 19.01.89	T. Manoharan	Public - Letter to Editor	Udappu Tamil M. V.	786 students - only 1 graduate - 15 in all - classes up to A/L
12.	VK 11.03.89	Correspondent	-	Udappu Tamil M. V.	Approved Cadre - 28 teachers - only 15 teachers - A/L students suffering
13.	VK 08.03.89	T. Manoharan	Public - Letter to Editor	Ponduloya Tamil M. V. Nuwara Eliya Dt.	1200 students - Approved Cadre 60 teachers - only 18 teachers - Fed by 11 schools in the Region - A/L students suffering.
14.	VK 14.03.89	T. Manoharan	Letter to Editor	Ratnapura Tamil Vid.	This school has to be upgraded with A/L classes - Shortage of teachers - for Science, Maths, Hinduism and Tamil
15.	VK 24.03.89	Y. M. H. A.	Appeal to Hon. A. C. S. Hameed	Alawatugoda	Need to create a Tamil school in Alawatugoda
16.	VK 06.04.89	Mr. Altanayake	M. P.	Universities outside N - E Province	Need to open Tamil stream courses
17.	VK 20.04.89	Nallur Correspondent	-	N - E Province	Principals complain that Education Ministry Circulars are in Sinhala only
18.	VK 05.05.89	K. Arudpragasam	Article	Mannampitiya Tamil School	Established in 1892 - Nearing 100 years - classes up to O/L - 300 students - only 14 teachers - only 1 toilet - no quarters - Mahaweli authority spends lakhs on other things but not this school
19.	VK 10.05.89	Correspondent	-	General	Letters of appointment to Tamil teachers and graduate teachers in Sinhala only by Education Ministry
20.	VK 20.05.89	All Ceylon Muslim Education Congress	-	General	Deplores circulars to Tamil medium schools in Sinhala only - Resolution calls for circulars to be in Tamil
21.	VK 07.06.89	Sridar Karuna	Letter	Ratnapura	Hapugastenne Tamil MV - 500 students - only volunteer teachers - 50 years old - No Quarters - Principal left - only up to Gr. 6 classes
22.	VK 08.06.89	Editorial	-	General	Deplores the plight of Tamil medium schools - regrets step - motherly treatment
23.	VK10.06.89	K. Arumugam	Article	Nuwara-Eliya Dt.	In all 1450 teachers - 9% Hindu teachers - 2% Christians - only 150 local teachers - 1300 outsiders want locals also appointed



24.	VK 12.06.89	K. Sahadevarajah	Letter	General	In recruitment of teachers - those competent to teach Hinduism must be recruited
25.	VK 12.06.89	Vira Sokkan	Letter	Mundel	Mundel Tamil Vid. - O/L Classes also there - But teachers shortage prevails
26.	VK 15.06.89	S. Thavarajah	Letter	Chenkaladi Tamil Vid.	Shortage of teachers and other short comings
27.	VK 30.06.89	T. Manoharan	Letter	Pinnawala, Norwood School	(1) Pinnawala Tamil Vid. - 350 students to sit O/L in Dec. shortage of teachers - 2 social science trained. 1 English trained - 4 estate Teachers and 1 volunteer teacher only on staff (2) Norwood Tamil M. V. - 25 students to sit A/L - No graduate teachers - 2000 students in all
28.	VK 08.08.89	K. Velautham	Provincial Councillor	Uva Province	Collecting particulars of shortage of teachers and other inconveniences in schools in Uva Province
29.	VK 28.08.89	Editorial			Deplores letters sent in Sinhala to applicants for posts of Tamil teachers
30.	VK 28.08.89	Udappu Cor.			Letters re postponement of Examination for teachers - in Sinhala only
31.	VK 28.08.89	Correspondent		Opanaike Tamil Vid.	Opanaike Tamil Vid - Earlier there were 1 Principal and 3 teachers - Now only 1 teacher
32.	VK 20.11.89	Janab A. H. M. Azewer	Hon. Minister of State	Passara Tamil M. V.	900 students - 21 classes - earlier 28 teachers - now only 8 teachers - Notice of question given in Parliament
33.	VK 25.11.89	Maugama Correspondent		Deikeit Estate School	Agalawatta Deikeit Estate School has no teachers - over 200 students
34.	VK 13.12.89	Correspondent		St. Anne's Tamil Vid. Wattala	Hon. S. Thondaman writes to Hon. Minister of Education to open St. Anne's Tamil Vid. in Wattala for the benefit of Tamil students - also new buildings. (on a complaint by W. P. C. Member Mr. R. R. Ramdas)
35.	VK 16.12.89	Mr. Prince Casinader	M. P.	Advisory Panel	Education and Cultural Affairs Ministry Advisory Panel discussions in Sinhala only - Don't make us strangers in own country because we do not know Sinhala - Complaint in Parliament on 15.12.89
36.	VK 30.12.89	V. S. Ganesh	Letter	Palaly Teachers' College	Sad plight of its status and future

37.	VK 03.01.90	Deraniyagala Correspondent -	Teaching appointments	Although 14 up-country Tamils were qualified, they were not called for interviews - Hon. S. Thondaman intervened Dehiowita Director of Education promised inquiry Later only 11 were called for interview
38.	VK 23.01.90	Correspondent	Bandarawela M. M. V.	At the function organised at the Bandarawela M. M. V. for distribution of free books by His Excellency - all programmes in Sinhala not even cultural programmes in Tamil - only Vote of Thanks in Tamil
39.	VK 29.01.90	Mr. Thasan Fernando	CWC Advisor on Educational matters in W. P.	Appeal to Hon. S. Thondaman to initiate action to re-open all schools closed after 1983
40.	VK 21.02.90	Mr. Mavai Senathirajah	M. P.	General
41.	VK 03.03.90	Rakwana Correspondent	Avisawella District	Answering a question in Parliament by Mr. Mavai Senathirajah M. P. in Parliament on 20.02.90 Hon. Lokubandara promises that all Forms will be in all three languages In Avisawella district there are 13 estates - There is only one school - Puwakpitiya Tamil Vid. - appeals to improve it of no avail. Only 3 small buildings. There is a serious space problem

42.	VK 09.03.90	Damianpillai	Puttalam District	Letter	Regrets that Tamil is not being used as official language - Public inconvenienced
43.	VK 10.03.90	Kandy Correspondent	General	-	Hon. S. Thondaman deplored the Education Dept.'s indifference towards the Education of the Plantation Tamils.
44.	VK 30.03.90	Avisawella Correspondent	St. Mary's Tamil Vid. Avisawella	-	Tamil residents fear closure of the evening school since there are only 2 Teachers for 350 students.
45.	VK 20.04.90	Mr. R. R. Ramdas	Millakande Estate Tamil School - Matugama	WP. Prov. Councillor	Many Tamil students - No teachers
46.	VK 11.05.90	Puttalam Correspondent	Puttalam District	-	Tamil schools in the District not cared for by the Education Dept.
47.	VK 19.05.90	Kandy Correspondent	Kandy & Plantation areas	-	Provincial Councillor Mr. S. Sathasivam deplored inadequacy of teachers - at present, 1 teacher for 150 students - wants more teachers
48.	VK 23.05.90 VK 06.11.91	Correspondent Sri Muggan - Correspondent	Wattala	-	Hindu Welfare Society appeal for the creation of a Tamil M. V. in Wattala. Hon. M. S. Sellasamy promises to establish same soon
49.	VK 27.05.90	Deraniyagala Correspondent -	Deraniyagala Kathiresan Vidyalaya	-	School Development Society protests against transfer of teachers when there is already a shortage of teachers

50.	VK 18.06.90	Bandarawela Correspondent	Attampitiya	Agitation by parents for a separate Tamil school-now only evening classes
51.	VK 25.06.90	Bandarawela Correspondent	Attampitiya	Agitation by parents for a separate Tamil school-now only evening classes
51.	VK 25.06.90	S. Selvaraja	Regala Correspondent	At the Hewaheta Tamil Vid. classes only up to Grade 6 - There are no Tamil schools in areas around in Hanguranketa-For further education students have to go to Galaha and Delloia areas - 12 miles away - students of over 20 Muslim and Tamil schools affected. Long agitation not fulfilled
52.	VK 25.06.90	Correspondent	News	Education Minister Hon. Lalith Athulathmudali assured a CWC delegation led by 3 Ministers and others that all circulars will be issued in Tamil also
53.	VK 27.06.90	Correspondent	News	Uva residents complain to Hon.State Minister of Education Ms. Rajamanohary Pulendran that there are problems in Education - Buildings, Lands, Furniture teachers and other staff - Provincial Minister of Education also present - He was directed to look into the problems.

54.	VK 17.07.90	Deraniyagala Correspondent	News	Dehiowita	No Tamil officers in the Education Cluster Office at Dehiowita - No place for Tamil - All circulars in Sinhala only - Tamil teachers in a fix
55.	VK 06.08.90	Correspondent	News	Maskeliya	S. Govindaraj Dist. Representative of Works National Congress appeals to Education authorities to create a Tamil M. V. in Sami Malai in Maskeliya for the benefit of Tamil students
56.	VK 09.08.90	Correspondent	News	Plantation Areas	A delegation of National Estate Workers Union led by Secretary and Uva Provincial Councillor Mr. K. Velautham. Kandy Provincial Councillor Mr. Puthirasingamany met Hon. Minister of State for Education and wanted (1) Tamil M. V. V. in all Districts in up-country (2) more teachers (3) separate - cluster for Tamils and (4) a full-fledged Teachers College
57.	VK 18.10.90	Editorial		Uva	Criticizes, Education authorities for not attending to the Education needs of the Tamils in the Province
58.	VK 08.03.91	Correspondent	News	Madulseema M. V.	1500 students - Not enough of teachers



59. VK 08.03.91 N. Vijayarajah News Ratnapura  
Ratnapura Correspondent  
Only 1 Tamil Vidyalaya - No facilities for A/L Sc. & Commerce - No Maths and English teachers. shortage of teachers - Education officers indifferent to appeals
60. VK 19.03.91 Kandy Correspondent News Kalahokke Tamil Vid.  
680 students - only 9 teachers - Parents worried about the education of their children
61. VK 14.11.91 K. Anuprakash Letter Sammanturai  
VK 22.11.91  
Ranamadu Tamil Vid. is close to the Central Camp area in Amparai Dist. and comes under Sammanturai Cluster of schools. Only one building 20 x 80. 1100 students, only Grade 5. No furniture. Students sit on the floor. As it is not fenced, stray cattle occupy the school at nights. Sammanturai Cluster Education authorities do not pay any attention - No teachers - only Volunteer Teachers keep the school going
62. VK 01.11.91 J. Saikurunathan Letter Nuwara Eliya  
Rilamulla Tamil Vid. functioning in an estate factory. About 1000 students. only 14 teachers. No graduate teachers. Not even trained teachers for Science, Maths, Tamil and English. No water facilities. Quarters or play-ground. No transport facilities. classes up to Grade 10, Not cared for.

63. VK 06.07.91 Ratnapura Correspondent News Hapugastenna  
Tamil M. V.  
There are 4 Tamil Vidyalayas with classes up to Grade 5 only. Totaling 1000 students. Anumudenna Tamil Vid., Mehenakanda Tamil Vid., Ratganga Tamil vid. and Wewelketiya Tamil Vid. No proper bus service to go to Ratnapura Tamil M. V. Parents have appealed to combine all 4 Vidyalayas into Hapugastenna Tamil M. V. 2 acres land acquired. Hon. Thondaman & others promised to establish the Tamil M. V. during elections. People are anxious.
64. VK 07.08.91 Kandy Correspondent Kandy Tamil M. V.  
VK 18.11.91  
Need for a Tamil M. V. in Kandy - It was decided by well-wishers to establish it at Hatane along with the Hatiane Estate School. Will benefit over 1000 students
- DN 30.08.91 Nugawela Cor.  
TKN 07.12.91
65. VK 02.07.91 Ratnapura Correspondent Lellopitiya Tamil Vid.  
Over 200 students - only 2 teachers. Repeated complaints to Education Office - Turns a blind eyes
66. VK 14.11.91 Bandarawela Correspondent Pallekettuwe Tamil Vid.  
Parents want this school upgraded to a M. V. as hundreds of students have to go to far off places to pursue their studies - Uva Provincial Education Ministry has not yet taken any action

67. DN 22.10.91 Haputale Correspondent  
VK 22.11.91 Bandarawela Correspondent

Diyatalawa Tamil Vid.

Haputale Pradeshya Saba Member  
Mr. N. S. Sangadevan urged the Chairman  
Mr. Jayatilake Bandara to take steps to  
establish a Tamil Vid. The Saba  
unanimously resolved to appeal to Uva  
Chief Minister, Mr. Perey Samaraweera.  
The parents are also agitating as hundreds  
of students are affected.

### ANNEXURE B Education Buildings

SERIAL NO.	SOURCE	NAME OF COMPLAINANT	POSITION	NAME OF SCHOOL OR AREA	NATURE OF COMPLAINT
1.	VK 13.06.89	V. L. Pereira	Secretary Agricultural Liberation Front	Queensbury Tamil Vid.	School taken over by Govt. on 15.07.80 - 420 students. No roof, worn-out cracking walls & flooring - Letter to Ministry requesting action.
2.	VK 28.08.89	Correspondent	-	Opanaika	Opanaika Tamil Vid 50 years old buildings in state of collapse
3.	VK 30.12.89	C. W. C.	Letter	Wellaweli Tamil Vid.	School building and lack of furniture
4.	VK 21.12.90	M. Iyathurai	Secretary S. D. S.	Prdrathmalai Estate school	Bad condition of school building and lack of furniture
5.	VK 26.12.90	Kegalle Correspondent	News	Warakapola Banane Tamil Vid.	Old building near collapse. No action taken in spite of representations made to authorities
6.	DN 30.08.91	Dehiowita Correspondent	-	Dehiowita Tamil Vid.	School building put up 25 years ago for 200 students only. Today average daily attendance 600. Inadequate space - Education Dept. keeping dumb. Attention of Education Ministry & Kegalle Dist. M. P. P. drawn to this serious problems

Note : VK - Virakesari TKN - Thinakaran DN - Daily News

## Conclusions and Recommendations

This study is based on complaints relating to non-implementation of Tamil as official language in various spheres. In an attempt at concision, the data here represented comes from material which appeared in a single newspaper, the *Virakesari*. Nonetheless, it is pertinent to point out that similar, corroborative reports did appear in other contemporary journals, the *Thinakaran* and the *Thinapathy*.

I undertook a detailed ten-year study of the functioning of the Ministry of Tamil Language Implementation between 1978 and 1988 to show the inaction of the Ministry during a critical period in the nation's history. A decade of inaction points to the inescapable fact that the function of this Ministry was to see that Tamil language provisions were not implemented.

The present move to implement the provisions of the Sixteenth Amendment has to be viewed against this background of bureaucratic inaction. That at this writing, Sinhala and Tamil are being taught to public servants and children in schools is certainly a welcome step in the right direction. Because we see a new generation of children studying both languages willingly, the ghost of Tamilphobia which since 1956 had undermined the progress and prosperity of this country is now proven a creation of the cheap politician. If prejudice does not stir enough to enable the cheap politician to occupy a Parliamentary seat, the more harmonious and equal relations which characterised Sri Lankan society in the pre-colonial period can once again be ushered in. The country stands a chance of entering an era of peace and prosperity as a nation cohered by the actual ingredients and spirit of unity.

An analysis of what is going on at the time of this writing points to the existence of four situations. They are -

- (i) Tamil-speaking citizens are frustrated that the Sixteenth Amendment to the Constitution granting official status to Tamil language is being ignored. The mass media have effectively insulated the people's voices of grievances from reaching the government.
- (ii) In consequence, the country stands divided right now. Tamil-speaking citizens agitate for the early implementation of the

Sixteenth Amendment of the Constitution. Their grievances remain little-discussed because the Sinhala and English mass media have failed to publicise their cause. The bureaucracy is not prepared even to respond to the call of the Director of Establishments to furnish Tamil-speaking staff and other requirements. Their administration remains their own.

Unless deep and fundamental change occurs in bureaucratic attitudes, it is not possible to implement the Sixteenth Amendment to the Constitution.

## Recommendations

- (a) Allow those bureaucrats who do not want to fall in line with the Government's languages policy to retire from service;
- (b) Immediately purchase the required number of standard keyboard typewriters in Tamil. Supply them to all offices. (**Note:** This was recommended by the Jayewardene Committee as far back as 1946. Even Tamil Nadu deferred the implementation of Tamil as official language by one year in 1960 in order to get the required number of standard keyboard Tamil typewriters). No implementation is possible without typewriters.
- (c) Absorb immediately all those who have passed the full course of Tamil stenography, and Tamil typewriting at the Kokuvil and Sammanturai Technical Colleges as well as the National Apprentice Board and post them to government service.
- (d) Select through a competitive examination Tamil stenographers/typists who have obtained certificates at private institutions, if more of them are required.
- (e) Release the results of examinations immediately and make selections for appointments.
- (f) Reemploy retired Tamil translators and public servants who can do translation from and to Tamil. Training of public servants in both Sinhala and Tamil is not going to solve this immediate problem.

Even with this crash program, there is still bound to be a problem. How many Tamil speakers are there today in the Public Service even in the mid-grade levels - especially clerical service? This shortage will still affect this process. This is a matter for separate study.

- (g) Start a course in translation at the University level. To begin with, a diploma course of two years' duration may be introduced. In three years it may be enlarged into a degree course of three years' duration. This will help not only in administration but also in education. Much as contemporary educational material have to be brought within the fold of Sinhala and Tamil languages.
- (h) The Official Languages Commission Act No.18 of 1991 has powers under Article 8(1) and (ii) to appoint Committees to assist the Commission in the discharge of duties. An effective Monitoring Committee has to be appointed immediately if anything meaningful is to be achieved.

Unless these measures are followed, nothing tangible will be achieved. Yet for Sri Lanka to realize a participatory democracy which possesses adequate linguistic representation and brings the country into its dream of national progress, these measures must be followed. Communication is the path of a progressive country: how at this crucial juncture can Sri Lanka *not* afford to obtain an equitable language policy which implements its long-standing adoption Tamil as an official language?

**A. Theva Rajan** is a former public servant who retired prematurely under the 'language clause' after 24 years of service. He is a freelance journalist and researcher who has been active in many social and cultural organisations. He is General Secretary of the Thaninayagam Foundation Trust, a member of the Governing Council of the Association of Tamil Research (Sri Lanka Unit), and a leading member of the Colombo Tamil Sangam.

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