

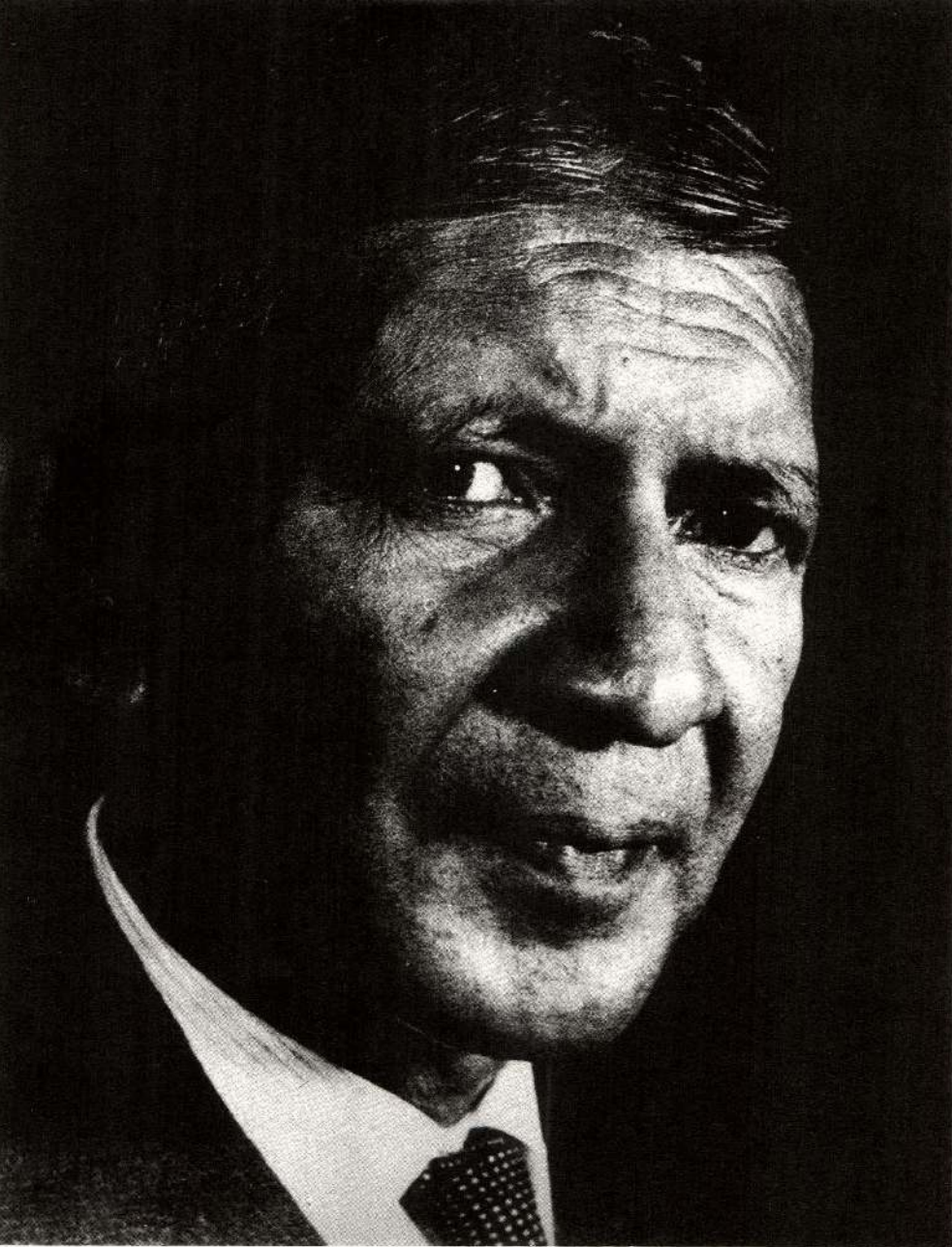
S.J.V. Chelvanayakam
and the Crisis of Sri Lankan
Tamil Nationalism, 1947-1977



A Political Biography

A. JEYARATNAM WILSON

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THE CRISIS OF SRI LANKAN
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S.J.V. Chelvanayakam, 1963. (Photo: *Ceylon Observer*)

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For Susili

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Wedding portrait, 1927

In legal attire, c. 1946

After the general election victory, 1947, with G. G. Ponnabalam and
C. Vanniasingham

Between pages 86 and 87

At the time of the Bandaranaike-Chelvanayakam pact, July 1957: during
the negotiations and immediately after the signing

Greeted by a crowd at Colombo airport on his way to Britain for
surgery, 1961

With Jawaharlal Nehru, Colombo, 1960

With M. G. Ramachandran, one-time Chief Minister of Tamil Nad,
c. 1970

Mr and Mrs Chelvanayakam greeting J. R. Jayewardene, August
1966

PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

S. J. V. Chelvanaykam entered Parliament in 1947 with no ambition whatsoever to become a leader, but only to be 'the dour guardian of the Tamil interests'.¹ Circumstances and objective historical processes turned him into the commanding figure that he became in a matter of eight years.

In 1955, he was the knight in shining armour confronting the juggernaut of militant Sinhala Buddhism and linguistic exclusivity. From 1956 till his death in 1977, he was the acknowledged leader of the Tamil people. He was the only statesman in Ceylon to be returned in five general elections in a row and to remain a hero and father-figure to his people uninterruptedly for twenty-one years.

In the heyday of Ceylon's democracy, Chelvanayakam was responsible for the parliamentary defeat of one government (April 1960), crucial to the parliamentary overthrow of another (December 1964), and the co-architect of a third (March 1965). In 1977, just before his death, he was unwilling to provide support for a fourth government which sought, against the canons of democracy, to extend its term in office.²

How did this happen to a high-flying barrister who loved his profession and to whom the pleasures of family life were important? Politics was furthest from his mind when he made his debut in 1946 as an ardent supporter of G. G. Ponnambalam and his All Ceylon Tamil Congress. Was it a quirk of history? Rather Chelvanayakam was a man of moral fervour who carried with him the strength of his convictions. Once the historical process had seduced him, its inexorable forces made him its chosen instrument irrespective of his own personal wishes. History placed him on centre stage at the height of the Tamil people's crisis in 1955-6 and thereafter kept him in that position where he had to live out and fulfil its destiny.

His personality pervaded the entire arena of the Tamils' political behaviour, and gave the dream of a traditional homeland, made them comfortable in the shadow of his universalistic leadership and invested them with a new political vocabulary and an unexpected weaponry to conserve and win for themselves a place in the firmament. For

1. Jane Russell, *Communal Politics under the Donoughmore Constitution, 1931-1947*, Dehiwela, 1982, p. 326.
2. In a private letter to my wife and myself addressed to us in Fredericton, Mrs Chelvanayakam explained the party's decision to resist the request but to attend the talks so as to satisfy those sections of Tamil opinion which were included to the view that every opportunity to resolve the problem must be given due consideration.

the cause of the Tamil people Chelvanayakam forsook the intimacy of family life, his health, and the wealth he could have accumulated as a leading specialist civil lawyer. He was never meant to be a political leader. Shy, withdrawn, reflective, sensitive and transparently honest, he was the archetype of the reluctant hero. But once propelled on his way, he would stop at nothing except violence, which he abhorred, to achieve what the dialectics of history deemed best for his people, a federal union of all the Sri Lankas.

Chelvanayakam was the historical charismatic figure born outside his home country, like Kemal Atatürk in Salonika and Napoleon Bonaparte in Corsica — his birthplace was Ipoh, in Malaya. He came with his mother, Harriet Annamma Velupillai, and his two brothers and sister to Tellippallai while his father remained in Malaya to earn and provide for the family. He spent his boyhood and youth in Jaffna. His ambition when he entered the legal profession was to become a judge of the Supreme Court.

I have sought in these pages to explain and analyse Chelvanayakam's career and character from within. For I knew him intimately and was privy to his innermost political thoughts between 1953 and 1977. I have tried to solve the unsolved mystery of this man who was like a visitor from another planet. The people for whom he sacrificed his all loved him but for them he remained a figure on a high eminence. The absence of his father from home in his formative years was a key factor in his development. Living in a social ethos that was and still is male-centred, he witnessed the daily discomforts and petty humiliations suffered by the mother whom he revered. He could not compensate for this lack of a paternal presence; he could merely repress it by his own conscious will.

There are times when the needs of a potentially extraordinary person and of history coincide and this occurred in the case of S.J.V. Chelvanayakam. He was the right person at the right time. History presented him with the opportunity to solve for his people what he had failed to solve for himself, namely the need for a father in the home. Without sacrificing his own family, he became *Thanthai Chelva* ('Father Chelva', as the Tamil people called him — the caring father of his people).

Acknowledgements

There are many to whom I owe an enormous debt, and apologise in advance to any whose names I miss — I did not succeed in keeping a faithful record of numerous individuals who volunteered information during the years I spent garnering material. The idea of writing this book with a view to publication came from Christopher Hurst, with

whom I worked closely on my previous book *The Break-up of Sri Lanka* (1988), and for this encouragement and later advice and reassurance I am grateful.

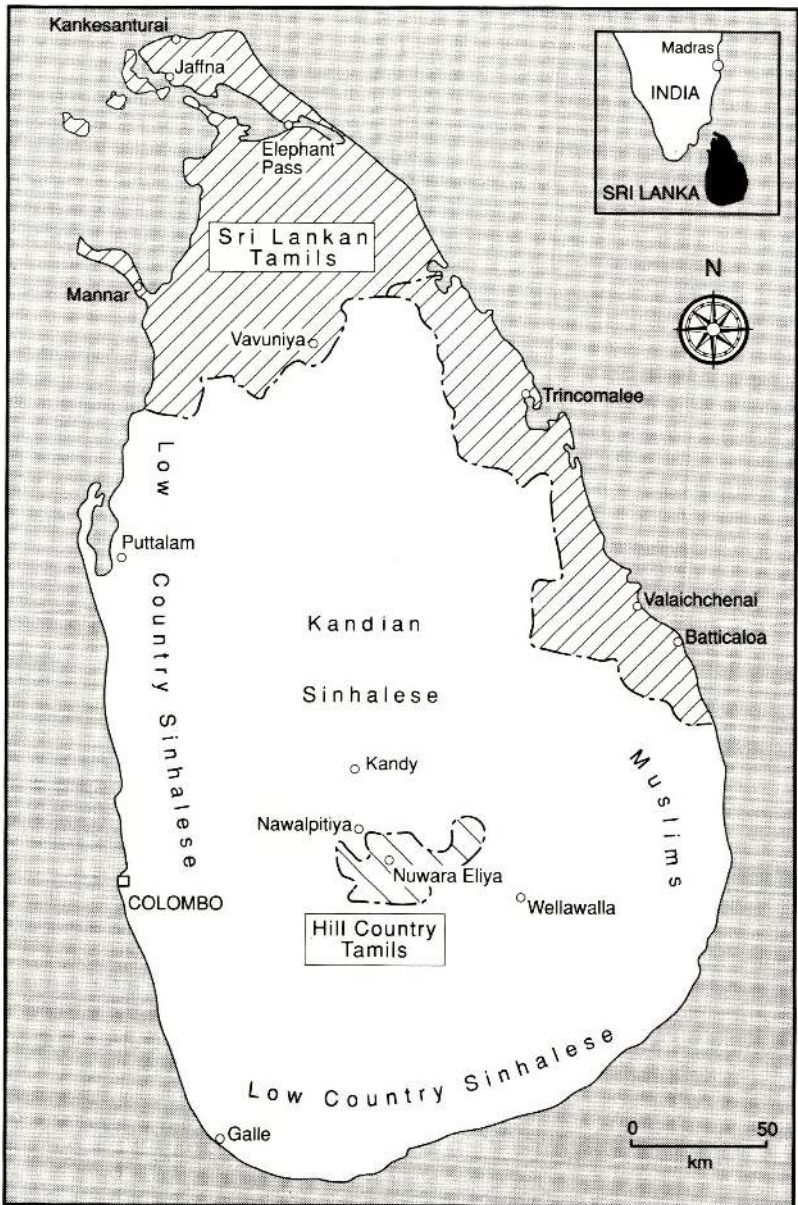
Six sources of access to confidential information, which I refer to as 'files', were vastly beneficial. The *Chelvanayakam file* yielded a rich vein. The *Gillingham file* provided insights during the phase when S. J. V. Chelvanayakam underwent surgery to relieve his Parkinsonism: the eminent Edinburgh surgeon, Mr F. J. Gillingham, readily sent me all the relevant correspondence in his possession. Letters of the Colombo solicitor S. Sivasubramaniam (the *Sivasubramaniam file*) gave me an account of the vital role he played in persuading Chelvanayakam to enter Ceylon Tamil politics. The young and enterprising Ms Vasukhi Nesiah conducted a number of searching interviews with persons who had close and friendly relations with Chelvanayakam (the *Vasukhi Nesiah file*). Mr Nihal Rodrigo (the senior director) and Mr D. S. de Silva (chief librarian) of the Associated Newspapers of Ceylon Ltd sent me copies of news clippings of the period 1947-77, covering almost the whole of Chelvanayakam's political life (the *Lake House file*), and other useful material, including some of the photographs used in the book — for their help I am extremely grateful. And valuable archival data from the FP office in Jaffna (the *FP file*), a labour of love by the late V. Dharmalingam, MP for Uduvil (Jaffna), were made available to me before the war took its murderous toll in the Jaffna peninsula; today it might well be impossible to trace them. One of Chelvanayakam's later files was sent to me by Ms M. V. Barr Kumarakulasinghe. My most valued informant was my wife Susili. As Chelvanayakam's only daughter she had been a constant listener to his 'table talk' and had in any case a fund of knowledge of his political thinking.

Additionally there are individuals who laboured hard on my behalf: Dr Ambalavanar Sivarajah of the Department of Political Science, University of Peradeniya, and E. R. A. Kanagaratnam, with his huge collection of archives on Tamil politics spanning several decades. Mrs Seema Saha, my research assistant, carried out essential searches among the files of the *Ceylon Daily News* stored in microfilm at the Harriet Irving Library, University of New Brunswick.

The two secretaries of the Department of Political Science at the University of New Brunswick, Mrs Rheta MacElwain and Mrs Debbie Sloan, gave of their professional skills when most needed, and I appreciate their care and concern.

University of New Brunswick
Fredericton
August 1993

A. JEYARATNAM WILSON



SRI LANKA Distribution of Ethnic Groups

BACKGROUND AND CHARACTER

Samuel James Velupillai Chelvanayakam was born in 1898 in the Malayan town of Ipoh. His father was a businessman, Viswanathan Velupillai, and his mother, Harriet Annamma Kanapathipillai, belonged to a family of high social standing. When Chelvanayakam was four years old, he was sent from Ipoh by his father, along with his mother, two brothers and a sister,¹ to obtain his secondary education in Tellippallai, a traditional village in the extreme north of Ceylon near the port town of Kankasanturai, the closest official crossing point to South India, 20 miles away. His mother established their home there.

It was then the practice of middle-class Tamil parents to send their children to schools in the Jaffna peninsula. British-ruled Malaya had few schools, and these were intended for Malayan royalty and the children of the richest families. Chelvanayakam spent eight and a half years at Union College, Tellippallai, and then went for five years to St John's College, a leading secondary school in Jaffna town, and thence to the élite St Thomas's College, Mount Lavinia, where he met his exact contemporary, the future Prime Minister S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike. He was said to have been a hard-working, almost overzealous student who did well in his studies, and showed little interest in sport. During these years, the family lived in the milieu of his mother's sisters, their husbands and children, and her brothers: Ariyanayakam (father of Anandanayagam who later became Principal of St Thomas's College), *Mudaliyar* Appathurai, and the Rev. S. K. Ponniah, who acted as Chelvanayakam's guide and adviser. Living as they did within an extended family network, the Velupillai household lacked a vital element with the absence of the father, and Chelvanayakam's mother felt diminished in the company of her sisters and brothers and their spouses. In that world women needed to have husbands to make the family unit complete.

S. K. Ponniah, one of the first Ceylonese graduates of the University of London and a minister of the Church of England, was an influential figure: a close friend of the politically powerful Corea family of Chilaw, he was also highly regarded by the Ilangakoons and the

1. Chelvanayakam's only sibling to survive to adult life was his brother E. V. Ponnuthurai, who lived to the age of eighty-five.

Bandaranaike. This eulogistic account of him by S. Sivasubramaniam also sheds light on Chelvanayakam, who was then under his influence:

... [Ponniah] was an excellent gentleman. He was cultured, public spirited, pious, national minded, patriotic. . . . He tried his best to be correct in his talk and actions and was conscientious. He was measured and dignified. He was not exuberant. . . .

I have heard him speaking from public platforms. He was earnest, matter of fact, careful, deliberate and studied. His nephew Mr Chelvanayakam appears to have imbibed some of his qualities and the spirit of his activities and utterances. . . .

Chelvanayakam graduated in science as an external student of the University of London around 1918. His first employment was as a teacher at St Thomas's, but when the Principal refused to grant him leave to visit his younger brother who was mortally ill, he resigned. He then moved to another secondary school, Wesley College, and while there prepared for and passed his law examinations. Qualifying as an advocate of the Supreme Court of Ceylon, he began his practice in the courts of first instance, seldom appearing in the court of civil appeal. His specialisation was in civil law; and he claimed that this had made him 'learned in the law', criminal work being mainly regarded by the profession as a matter of 'advocacy'. His learning and mastery of precedents won him the respect of the judges before whom he appeared.

In 1927, Chelvanayakam married Emily Grace Barr Kumarakulasinghe,² from an aristocratic family in Tellippallai whose members had served the Dutch and British administrations over several generations, as the chiefs of the premier administrative area. The influence and support of her father, the *Maniagar* (the British-appointed administrative chief of the area) R. R. Barr Kumarakulasinghe, was to count for much when Chelvanayakam first contested the Kankesanthurai constituency at the parliamentary general election of 1947. The *Maniagar* was chief for most of the area covered by that constituency.

Emily Grace possessed aesthetic sensibilities and developed a keen awareness of the world of Tamil politics. She was entirely supportive of her husband's political creed; she addressed some of his meetings and during the second half of his political career managed the newspaper *Suthanthiran* (Freedom). They had four sons and a daughter, and Emily Grace outlived her husband, surviving to the age of eighty-five.

2. Chelvanayakam addressed his wife by the name 'Rathinam', which was the way she was referred to by her family.

The arrival of Chelvanayakam's family in Tellippallai had a profound significance in his personal development, in a number of different ways. The first of these was that while he was growing up he lived in close proximity to Tamil Nad in South India. He learned South Indian classical music and its Carnatic tradition, and became an enthusiast for Tamil drama in Tellippallai, taking part himself. All through his life, he would wear Tamil dress at home and in Tamil areas on ceremonial occasions and when appearing on public platforms — this at a time when Western clothes were generally preferred. Thus he seems to have imbibed early and retained a strong Tamil consciousness.

Given the nearness of the South Indian mainland, it was to be expected that when Chelvanayakam conceived of the idea of federalism, he would think of a relationship with Tamil Nad in India, and of the Tamil areas of Ceylon forming a unit of the Union Republic of the Indian federation. However, he withdrew from this position as soon as politicians from Tamil Nad, when questioned on the subject by the pro-government press, expressed disapproval. The Tamil Nad influence predominated nevertheless.

Late in his life, in 1972, Chelvanayakam went to Madras with his principal campaigning lieutenant Appapillai Amirthalingam to talk with the leading politicians of that state on the parlous situation of the Tamils of Ceylon. He was received in Tamil Nad with respect and affection. However, in the intervening phase, ever since the launching in 1949 of his party the *Ilankai Thamil Arasu Kadchi* (ITAK),³ he had made no reference in public speeches and statements (dictated by him to his secretary, C. da Silva) to Tamil Nad as representing a fallback position. He did not wish to use it as a lever. It was his view that the Tamil people of Ceylon must struggle for their freedom by themselves.

Chelvanayakam had his early schooling at Union College, Tellippalai, as already mentioned, and these years in a rural setting, reinforced by his Christian upbringing, helped to mould the basic components of his worldview. His outlook was conservative. He strongly believed in Victorian values and an austere lifestyle despite earning a large professional income. Perhaps out of nostalgia, Chelvanayakam insisted on calling himself 'a man from the village' even when moving in the highest social and professional circles of Colombo. He was emphatic that he was from 'Jaffna' (which meant from anywhere in the Jaffna peninsula) and not from Colombo,

3. The Party also adopted an English appellation: 'The Federal Freedom Party of the Tamil-speaking Peoples' (FP). ITAK in translation means 'Ceylon Tamil Party for a Tamil government' (in a federal set-up).

though in Colombo society both Sinhalese and Colombo Tamils claimed him as 'one of them'. He made this assertion on the basis of conviction. In his political life he was always ready to identify himself with the Tamil people; he articulated their fears and anxieties and evolved a creed and a political manifesto which would give the Tamils a pride in themselves and persuade them to accept his messianic formula for their salvation — his proposal for a federal bi-ethnic state.

Chelvanayakam's life in Tellippallai had a lasting impact on him in another way too. He was a practising member of the Church of South India (CSI) in Jaffna, and in his later schooldays he became a member of the Church of England (later the Church of Ceylon). He remained attached to the Church of England in Colombo for a long time, but in later years when the Church of South India established a place of worship in Colombo, he became a regular communicant there.

Yet despite his Christianity, Chelvanayakam absorbed much of the Hindu ethos during his youth. He adhered to this Christian-Tamil Hindu contextualism also because quite a number of his relations were Hindus. He therefore made the paradoxical claim that he was a Christian by religion and a Hindu by culture.

The Tamil Christians had become very much westernised in dress, in their frequent use of the English language, in their food and in their life-style — in general they were deracinated. Chelvanayakam's first tryst with the submerged Tamil nationalism which had yet to be articulated was his insistence on retaining the Hinduistic cultural atmosphere in his way of life, in retaining customs that did not impinge on his Christianity such as wearing national dress whenever occasion permitted including his wedding day, and by always using the Tamil language except when practising his profession or communicating with non-Tamil-speakers. (A note on caste and class in the Tamil community can be found on page 140.)

This was no affected pseudo-nationalism. Chelvanayakam had learned to move in two worlds, the other being the modern Christian anglicised world of Colombo. But the cultural effects of his formative environment were strong; he was able to function as a convinced Christian while retaining in himself those aspects of Hinduism which he felt were quintessentially Tamil. This reconciliation made it easier for him to identify himself later with the politics of the Tamil people even though rivals and opponents accused him of being the Christian outsider. Once, replying to a letter printed in the *Ceylon Daily News* of 3 October 1970, from the Ven. Hewanpola Ratnasara, president of the Sinhala-Buddhist Organisation, Vidyalankara University, Chelvanayakam wrote, *inter alia*: 'You referred to my religion as Christian and therefore I had little in common with Tamils who were

mainly Hindus by religion. It stands to the credit of the Hindu people that they have not forced me or other Christians to change our faith before we lead them.' The reference here was to a number of Sinhalese leaders who, when the Donoughmore constitution⁴ conferred a universal franchise, abandoned Christianity in favour of Buddhism to improve their electoral chances.

Chelvanayakam's separation from his father, growing up with only his mother and two brothers and sister, left its mark. The family system in Tellippallai placed a premium on the presence of a father in the home. In the extended Ceylon Tamil family system the nearest uncle fulfilled the paternal role, and Chelvanayakam's maternal uncle S. K. Ponniah, a minister of the then Church of England in Ceylon, attempted to act as his guide. However, despite fine qualities and many friends in the élite circles of Colombo, he could not fill the gap in the young man's life. Chelvanayakam made just one visit to his father in Ipoh, shortly before the latter's death, after he had graduated in science from the University of London. It was evident from later conversations that he felt great affection for his father despite the separation.

As a young lawyer, despite his adherence to the Tamil nationalistic style of life, Chelvanayakam had no intention of seeking a role for himself in the Tamil political movement, which had no direction at that time. Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan had died in 1930, and the influential Jaffna Youth Congress, with idealistic but politically unwise leaders, successfully boycotted the first general election in constituencies in the Jaffna peninsula.⁵ Elections were held in the Eastern Province and at Mannar in the Northern Province. The Jaffna boycott was ostensibly a protest against the inadequacy of the Donoughmore reforms, on the grounds that these did not go far enough to satisfy the goal of *purana swaraj* (complete self-government) of the Congress. The protest movement petered out after two years, but the Tamils had blundered by losing opportunities to secure places

4. The Donoughmore reforms and, based on them, the Donoughmore Constitution (1931-47) received their name from Lord Donoughmore, chairman of the commission which visited Ceylon in 1928 and recommended partial internal self-government. The Constitution's principal features were the abolition of communal representation in the legislature, universal suffrage, and a Board of Ministers consisting of seven elected and three *ex-officio* members. The seven ministers were chosen by seven executive committees into which the State Council (the legislature) divided itself after a general election. Finance, legal affairs, defence, the public services and external relations were in the control of the three *ex-officio* members, who were the three (invariably British) Officers of State.
5. Jane Russell, 'The dance of the turkey cock: The Jaffna boycott of 1931', *Ceylon Journal of Historical and Social Studies*, new series, vol. VIII, no. 1 (Jan.-June 1978), pp. 47-67.

in the Board of Ministers, the elective executive under the Donoughmore constitution.

The vacuum was soon filled by a promising newcomer and stormy petrel, the young G.G. Ponnambalam, who came to mesmerise the Tamil people with brilliant rhetoric and his formula of balanced representation (half of the seats in the legislature for the majority Sinhalese and the remaining half for the combined minority communities). Ponnambalam was a skilled debater in the State Council, the legislature under the Donoughmore constitution, and is best remembered for his famous speech in the second State Council of the mid-1930s on 'Minorities and Constitutional Reform'. This was a statement of his defence of minority rights in the context of self-aggrandising Sinhala communalism.⁶

Chelvanayakam was not then involved in Tamil politics but only present at the fringes. However, his activities then to some extent anticipated his future role. In 1936 he assisted two Ceylon Tamils who sent petitions to Britain requesting a separate state for their people. The petitioners were Dr S. Ponniah, a major in the Ceylon Defence Force, and a notary of Vadamaradhchi named Vallipurunathan, both of whom showed their drafts to Chelvanayakam to find out his views. While he was not discouraging, he also did not give them open support.

Chelvanayakam formally entered Ceylon Tamil politics in 1944 when the British government announced the appointment of the Soulbury Commission on Constitutional Reform. At this point the Ceylon Tamils decided that they needed to create a political organisation to formulate their demands and articulate these to the Commission. This was the All Ceylon Tamil Congress (ACTC), and when it was launched Chelvanayakam was one of its principal organisers. He was regarded by the Ceylon Tamil public as deputy to Ponnambalam, who became President of the Congress. Many of the cosmopolitan Colombo élite and many more among the Ceylon Tamils gave weight to the Congress because of Chelvanayakam's reputation for sincerity and integrity. He formed part of the delegation when the case for balanced representation was presented by Ponnambalam to the Soulbury Commission.

For Chelvanayakam, then aged forty-five, this decision to enter political life was a turning-point. He had clearly reached a stage when, had he been like most others in his profession, he would have continued in the lucrative practice that he commanded and perhaps sought one of the coveted posts on the Supreme Court bench; in fact

6. *Minorities and Constitutional Reforms*, speech delivered in the State Council, Colombo: Virakesari Press, 1939.

this was twice offered to him by the Chief Justice, Sir John Howard.

Politics in the conventional sense meant nothing to him. For one thing he made his decisions in terms of his own philosophy of what he thought would save the Tamil people from the danger of being relegated to second-class citizenship and in terms of the feelings and fears which the Tamil people themselves expressed to him on his journeys. Also, his goal always remained the same, namely the unity of the Tamil people of the Northern and Eastern Provinces and of all the Tamil-speaking peoples in Ceylon, in particular the Tamil-speaking Muslims of the Eastern Province and the Indian Tamil plantation workers (whom he referred to as 'hill country Tamils', thus avoiding the designation 'Indian'), but including also all the other Ceylon Tamils scattered throughout the seven Sinhala provinces.

For Chelvanayakam Tamil politics was not a question of popular posturing, jousting with rivals for personal supremacy or winning ministerial portfolios in a Sinhala government. He regarded his political involvement, perhaps more than most politicians, as dedication to a cause, a life of sacrifice for the salvation of the Tamil people. In this spirit he accepted Ponnambalam's leadership, never questioning his honesty or ability to translate the message into action. He considered himself, with justice, to be an important pillar. However during this time he was germinating the federal concept, and he gave expression to this idea both in private conversation and on public platforms. He hoped to convert his leader and the ACTC to his point of view.

Ponnambalam, on the other hand, interpreted the mandate of 'responsive cooperation' with progressive-minded Sinhalese parties, received at the general election of 1947, as an authorisation to the ACTC by the Tamil electorate to secure portfolios in the cabinet, where a Tamil presence would enable Tamil problems to be aired and benefits obtained for the Tamil areas. Chelvanayakam for his part preferred to use Tamil cooperation as a lever to obtain an acceptable resolution of the Tamil concerns relating to citizenship rights for the Indian Tamil plantation workers, parity of status for the Sinhala and Tamil languages, an acceptable national flag for the new state, and the cessation of state-aided colonisation of the Tamil-speaking areas with Sinhala colonists. He wanted these pre-conditions satisfied. Most important, he wanted a constituent assembly convened to determine the island's future constitutional structure. Ponnambalam did not obtain these guarantees.

Even after Ponnambalam's acceptance of office in the government of D.S. Senanayake, Chelvanayakam did not take the next decisive step of resigning from the ACTC for some six months — the most difficult episode, as he said later, in his political life. He was not certain

of how the conflict should be resolved within the Congress — whether to secure the expulsion of Ponnambalam from it or organise a new party which would advance his solution of a federal system of government.

The Tamil people, in Chelvanayakam's view, were now leaderless. He felt they had been deceived and misled and that Ponnambalam had abandoned the cause, leaving a vacuum in Tamil politics. The tormenting question for him was whether or not it was his responsibility to provide the alternative leadership. It was a painful period of introspection and of discussion with his wife, his close family and his political friends and colleagues in the ACTC who wanted a break with Ponnambalam. As he put it, he was in 'cold storage' during these months. However he finally took the inevitable step of denouncing Ponnambalam and inaugurating a new political party, the Ilankai Thamil Arasu Kadchi (ITAK) or Tamil Federal Freedom Party (FP).⁷ This party, launched in December 1949, became within seven years the leading instrument for the implementation of Chelvanayakam's solution for the Tamil people. But meanwhile he saw his task as building a new nation, giving the Tamil people a sense of pride in their homeland, and educating them to rely on their own strengths and not on the favours and caprices of an alien Sinhala government. He was regarded by the public, Sinhala and Tamil alike, as the Moses who would lead his people to the promised land.

Chelvanayakam was lean and spare, and always held himself erect. Despite a heavily lined forehead, his appearance was mild and his speech deliberate, precise and moderate. Being a man of this type, he was sometimes said to be ill-suited to the task of opposing the egotistical and abrasive Ponnambalam, and no match for the '*Fuehrer*' of the Tamil Congress. But this was to overlook his moral strength and courage.

For Chelvanayakam his legal practice was all-consuming, and he earned a reputation for single-minded dedication, honesty and reliability which were to stand him in good stead when he entered politics. Among the friends he made were the lawyer H. V. Perera, whose advice was sought by many governments, and who tried to persuade him to accept a portfolio in D. S. Senanayake's cabinet; (Sir) Edward Jayatilleke, retired Chief Justice in independent Ceylon, who, with P. Navaratnarajah, QC, arranged for the meeting between

7. From a private file of letters addressed to me on the Tamil Congress and its formation by the late S. Sivasubramaniam, a founder-member of the Congress, hereafter referred to as '*the Sivasubramaniam file*'.

Chelvanayakam and S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike which resulted in the Bandaranaike-Chelvanayakam Pact of July 1957; and the bureaucrat (Sir) Oliver Goonetilleke, Governor-General in 1953-62.⁸

The latter two and another friend N. Sinnetaimby, later a judge of the Supreme Court, joined Chelvanayakam in buying and developing tea estates, an industry at that time wholly British-owned and British-managed. Chelvanayakam himself invested in two plantations as an insurance for his retirement, but he was careful to avoid owning a house in Colombo, believing that if his children became too deeply entrenched in the capital city they would become alienated from their parents' native Tellippallai. Accordingly they spent most of their vacations at the *Maniagar* Kumarakulasinghe's residence in Tellippallai. All this was in keeping with his nationalistic ideals and his unwillingness for himself and his family to be assimilated into the cosmopolitan society of Colombo.

Chelvanayakam's legal clientele comprised mainly *Chettians* (an Indian trading community) and Ceylon Tamils involved in commerce and civil suits. He had a special skill in disentangling accounts and imposing order on them for legal purposes — he could be heard in his chambers with clients calculating and repeating numbers in Tamil. He did not raise his fees significantly as he rose in seniority; this did not necessarily result in an increase in clients, and it certainly meant that he did not accumulate wealth.

Chelvanayakam's ambition in life, he had once told his family, was to be appointed a judge of the Supreme Court, the highest position a lawyer could attain in the British colonial administration. Fate ordained otherwise. S. Sivasubramaniam (whose account of Ponniah is quoted above) phoned him almost daily and often visited him to impress on him how urgent it was that he should enter the political life of the Tamil community.⁹ And in the end Chelvanayakam yielded, after he had become convinced that duty called him and that his mission in life was to identify himself with the goals of his community. The decision was deliberate and carefully considered, and thereafter he would stop at nothing short of violence and deceit to achieve what he believed was in his people's best interests. S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike, in the debate on 3 June 1958 on the declaration of a state of emergency after he had repudiated his pact with Chelvanayakam, observed: 'He is surely one of the most dangerous types of human beings in the world, quite in his own way sincere, in his own way an idealist, but having

8. For further information in the nascent phase of the party, see my 'The Tamil Federal Party in Ceylon Politics', *Journal of Commonwealth Political Studies* 4, July 1966.

9. *Sivasubramaniam file*.

no idea whatsoever of reality and the practical side of things. Very dangerous people, such people!¹⁰ He added despairingly that they (people of this kind) 'are capable of deluding themselves completely, capable of deluding others too'. It was, no doubt, an assessment based on intimate knowledge.

In saying that Chelvanayakam was dangerous and deluding himself and others, as well as being sincere and idealistic, the Prime Minister was justifying himself. He had brought the situation on himself by weakening under pressure from Buddhist monks who demanded the annulment of the compromise settlement he had made with Chelvanayakam on 26 July 1957. He was also responding to Chelvanayakam's criticism of his policies in the same debate when he said that 'the Honourable Prime Minister's statement that he will make Sinhalese the only official language of this country in twenty-four hours has brought him two widespread language riots within two years, one in June 1956, the other in May 1958'.¹¹

To understand the formulation and evolution of Chelvanayakam's political strategy, we need to examine the climate of expectations of the Tamil people at the time of his entry into politics and later. His interaction with them and with the prevailing political environment, as well as the trends in Tamil thinking, determined the nature of his political personality when it finally emerged, and created the dynamism which dominated the Tamil political movement during the twenty-one years of his leadership. This is the subject of the next chapter.

10. Parliamentary Debates, vol. 31 (May-June 1958), cols 244-5.

11. *Ibid.*, col. 56.

THE SITUATION OF THE TAMIL PEOPLE WHEN CHELVANAYAKAM ENTERED POLITICS

Before Chelvanayakam and his ITAK came on the scene, the Tamil political tradition was ambivalent and lacked direction. His predecessors since the turn of the century — the Ponnambalam brothers Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan and Sir Ponnambalam Arunachalam, and after them G.G. Ponnambalam — had conceived of Tamil involvement in terms of the national whole. They emphasised the need for the Tamil community to play its due part in the political process, but adapted their strategies to the island's prevailing political circumstances and expectations.

For the Ponnambalam brothers the question of the Tamil share in representation was important. They functioned in an 'élitist' ethos; there was a limited franchise, but the Ceylon Tamils had a significant share in it because of their educational advantages which they owed to the activities of American and British Christian organisations in the Ceylon Tamil heartland of the Jaffna peninsula during the nineteenth century. In these circumstances the Ponnambalam brothers trusted the Sinhalese political leaders who in turn, during the first two decades of the twentieth century, looked to them for political leadership. This inter-élite cooperation reached its peak when Ramanathan was elected the first Educated Ceylonese Unofficial Member to the Legislative Council in 1911 and Arunachalam became the first President of the Ceylon National Congress in 1919. Thereafter differences developed between the two leaderships on the question of the Tamil share in a communally elected legislature. The Sinhalese for their part insisted that communal electorates be replaced by territorial representation. Arunachalam died disillusioned in 1924, and Ramanathan continued to voice the concerns of the Ceylon Tamils until he died in 1930. However, from the exit of Arunachalam from the Ceylon National Congress in 1921 until G. G. Ponnambalam emerged in the mid-1930s as a credible leader, the Ceylon Tamils were bereft of organisation, strategy and leadership. The various Ceylon Tamil conferences and organisations of the intervening period lacked purpose and direction.

G. G. Ponnambalam's emergence as the accepted Ceylon Tamil leader was made easier by the grant of universal suffrage under the Donoughmore constitution of 1931. He entered the State Council in

1934, after which his standing among the Ceylon Tamils rose meteorically. His new prominence resulted, among other things, in the Ceylon Tamils of Colombo losing much of their influence. The latter had obtained their pre-eminence with the inauguration of the Legislative Council under the Colebrooke reforms of 1833 and they retained it until the Donoughmore constitution. The Ponnambalam brothers and their forebears were at the centre of this Colombo Tamil dominance. With G. G. Ponnambalam other Ceylon Tamils came to the fore, among them S. J. V. Chelvanayakam, E. M. V. Naganathan and S. Sivasubramaniam. These new leaders were also Colombo-centred, but they had been brought up in Jaffna and maintained their roots in their home area.

G. G. Ponnambalam spearheaded the demand for balanced representation for the minority communities (known as 'fifty-fifty'); this implied a communally-based legislature with 50 per cent of the seats for all the minorities — Ceylon Tamils, Indian Tamils, Muslims, Malays, Burghers and Europeans — and 50 per cent for the Sinhalese. However, this was not supported beyond a large section of the Ceylon Tamils of the Jaffna peninsula and Colombo. The Eastern Province Tamil representatives in the State Council were not in favour of it, and the Indian Tamils were not definitely committed. The Muslims under T. B. Jayah's leadership expressed qualified approval, but other prominent Muslim leaders did not accept the formula as a solution. Finally the Governor Sir Andrew Caldecott, in his Reforms Despatch to the Colonial Office in 1938, refused to endorse it. It received a mortal blow when one of the fifty-fifty group, Arunachalam Mahadeva, broke ranks on being elected to the Donoughmore Board of Ministers and declared that he had had his mental reservations on Ponnambalam's scheme and that, as far as the imperial government was concerned, it was 'as dead as the dodo'.

Even with so little support from outside his own ranks, Ponnambalam persisted in his advocacy. He was backed by the British-owned *Times of Ceylon* and certain European interests, and by those Ceylon Tamils who were becoming increasingly conscious of the Sinhalese monopoly over appointments to the public services, the state's budgetary allocations and major construction projects. When he launched the All Ceylon Tamil Congress (ACTC) in 1944, there was open support from large sections of the Ceylon Tamil middle class, especially clerical workers and middle-ranking public servants. His support in the Jaffna peninsula was in large part due to Chelvanayakam closely identifying himself with the new Tamil political movement. For the first time since the beginning of British rule in Ceylon, the Ceylon Tamils had found a political anchor and a solid organisation which could articulate their fears and anxieties and suggest a solution to the

problem of how these could be alleviated — specifically by means of a legislature based on balanced representation.

Ponnambalam overreached himself by remaining inflexible on his formula when groups of Sinhalese State Councillors favoured a compromise in the ratio of 60:40 or even 55:45.¹ D. S. Senanayake and his conservative supporters opposed any compromise which would have altered the territorial principle in representation; not that 60:40 or 55:45 would have done this, because even with these ratios the constituencies were to be demarcated territorially and not as separate communal electorates. In the end Sir Ivor Jennings² produced his scheme for weightage in representation to sparsely populated areas where the Ceylon Tamil and Muslim minorities were settled, thus maintaining the territorial basis. The minority communities obtained a compromise on fifty-fifty. Jennings's proposal received the support of Senanayake and the Board of Ministers — with the exception of Arunachalam Mahadeva, who insisted that a royal commission be appointed to settle the question of representation. The Ministers incorporated the Jennings compromise on fifty-fifty in their Draft Scheme of 1944 (Sessional Paper XIV of 1944). In 1945 this was accepted by the Soulbury Commission in its Report.

Ponnambalam and his associates in the ACTC would have been better advised to alter course and put forward a case for a federal constitution. Two Ceylon Tamils, as referred to above, had addressed memorials to the King (George V) in the mid-1930s. Chelvanayakam had vaguely articulated federalism as a solution, but in the end he closed ranks with the ACTC.

Thus although Ponnambalam and the ACTC mobilised Ceylon Tamil opinion in favour of the fifty-fifty demand, they failed to realise that Britain would not grant this claim over the head of Senanayake. Left-wing parties at this time correctly interpreted the trend when they asserted that Britain would enter into an agreement with their 'compradore bourgeois' counterpart, D. S. Senanayake. Earlier Caldecott, the Governor, had rejected the case for balanced representation in his Reforms Despatch of 1938. Ponnambalam should have grasped the fact of Britain's partiality for Senanayake at this stage. The ACTC now had to choose one of two alternatives: it could change tack and

1. Jane Russell's *Communal Politics under the Donoughmore Constitution, 1931-1947* (Dehihwela, Sri Lanka: Tisaroparakasakayo, 1982) provides information on the various efforts to seek a compromise on the fifty-fifty demand.
2. This noted British constitutional expert was at the time Principal of the University College in Colombo; later he was Vice-Chancellor of the University of Ceylon. During the phase of Ceylon's negotiations for independence, he functioned as D. S. Senanayake's constitutional adviser, and continued in that role during the latter's Premiership (1947-52).

press hard with the British government for a federal system, or alternatively seek a negotiated settlement with Senanayake.

Ceylon Tamil thinking lacked clearly defined objectives during this phase. It was based on the mistaken belief that the British presence would continue and that Ceylon would be granted restricted self-government and not complete independence; with independence still to be granted at some time in the future, the ACTC would have had some leverage. The situation changed rapidly when Britain decided in 1947 to transfer power to India and Pakistan. Senanayake seized the opportunity to press Ceylon's case, and the ACTC was thus left stranded with no bridges to Britain or to him. The ACTC also did not have any relationship with Ceylon's left-wing parties, which were powerful at this time. As a consequence the Ceylon Tamils found themselves once more isolated, as they had been in 1931.

Ponnambalam had evolved at a reasonably swift pace from the lone campaigner for rights for the minority communities, which he was when first elected to the State Council in 1934, to the charismatic leader of the Ceylon Tamils in the late 1930s. He was acclaimed as such when Whitehall announced the appointment of the Soulbury Commission in 1943, and remained intransigent in this position even after his failure to obtain balanced representation.

D. S. Senanayake successfully undermined Ponnambalam in 1947 when he appealed to the latter's supporters from the Ceylon Tamil constituencies in the Northern Province to vote for the motion accepting Britain's grant of internal self-government, as recommended by the Soulbury Commission.³ S. Natesan, son-in-law of Sir P. Ramanathan; J. Tyagaraja, a wealthy member of the Colombo Tamil élite; and Arunachalam Mahadeva, son of Sir P. Arunachalam and Minister for Home Affairs in the Donoughmore Board of Ministers, voted for Senanayake's motion. Of these, Natesan and Tyagaraja had been in general agreement with Ponnambalam on his demand for balanced representation. Ponnambalam was not present in the State Council when Senanayake's motion was debated and voted upon.

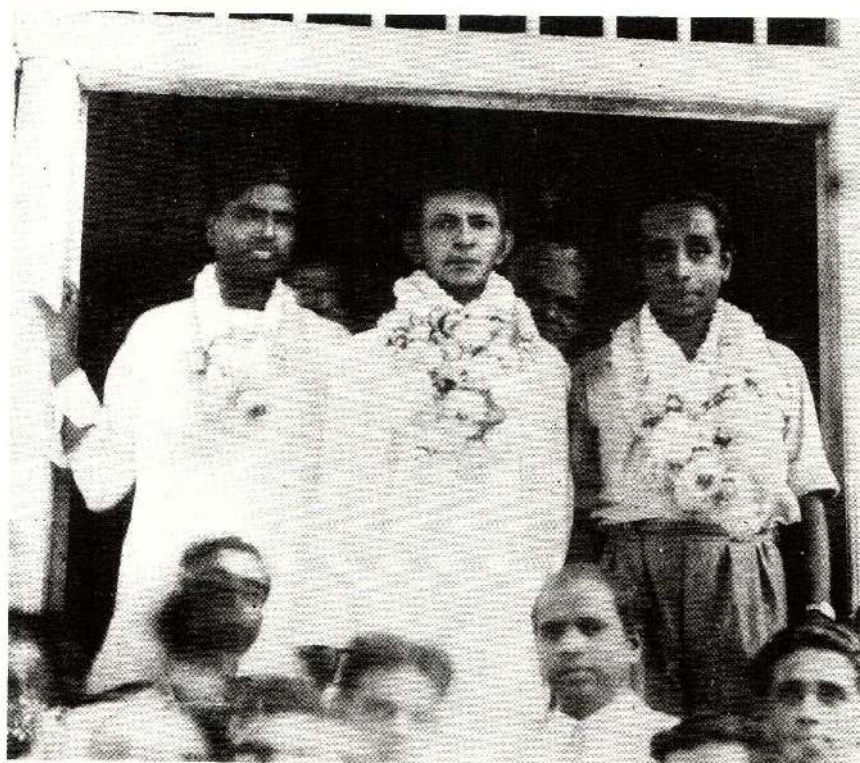
Ponnambalam was absent because in a last-minute effort to save the situation for the Ceylon Tamils he travelled to London, but the mission failed. A member of the House of Lords, Lord Croft, was persuaded to raise a question, as was Tom Driberg in the House of Commons. However, Whitehall had made up its mind that Senanayake was their best bet.

A third failure of Ponnambalam and the ACTC was their neglect

3. Chelvanayakam was not at this time a member of the (Donoughmore) State Council.



Wedding portrait of S.L.V. Chelvanayakam and Emily Grace Barr Kumarakulasinghe, 1927. It is noteworthy that he is wearing Tamil national dress at a time when it was fashionable among the English-speaking Christian élite to wear Western clothes. (The marriage was celebrated according to the rites of the Church of South India.)



Above, in barrister's wig, c. 1946, shortly before becoming a King's Counsel.

Below, after the 1947 general election victory. Chelvanayakam is in the centre; on his left is G. G. Ponnambalam, leader of the All Ceylon Tamil Congress of which Chelvanayakam was deputy leader; and on his right is C. Vanniasingham, who had become MP for Kopay and became deputy leader of Chelvanayakam's FP. He died in 1959, aged forty-eight.

of the Ceylon Tamils of the Eastern Province, to whom they had not adequately explained their position. The State Council members from that province were never in sympathy with the demand for balanced representation, and supported Senanayake's motion for acceptance of the Soulbury constitution. There were social and political gaps between the Ceylon Tamils of the Jaffna heartland and those, in particular, of Batticaloa, and because the latter had not been taken into the ACTC's confidence, there was disunity between them. This extended to the élite sector of Colombo Tamils, who were also not supportive of the ACTC. On the other hand, the Ceylon Tamils at the middle and lower levels in government service were apprehensive of their future in a Sinhala-dominated polity and they therefore backed the ACTC.

In general, the Colombo Tamil élite expected to work with their Sinhalese counterparts. The Batticaloa Tamils thought likewise: they were receptive to the carrot of political and administrative appointments being dangled by Senanayake's lieutenants in his newly-formed United National Party; a victory for Senanayake in the 1947 general election, enabling him to form the independence government, thus appeared to offer them tangible benefits.

Despite these considerable disadvantages, Ponnambalam's charisma carried the day in the Jaffna peninsula and even in one outlying constituency in the Northern Province (Mannar-Mullaitivu). Natesan, Tyagaraja and Arunachalam Mahadeva suffered defeat because of their support of the Soulbury constitution. Ponnambalam himself contested the Jaffna constituency and defeated Arunachalam Mahadeva. Chelvanayakam won against Natesan in Kankasanturai. Despite not having spread its doctrine or its organisational network in the Eastern Province, the ACTC won one of two seats it contested there. It was left to Chelvanayakam and his ITAK to cover the ground there when they started their campaign for a federal constitution in 1949.

Ponnambalam claimed that the results of the 1947 general election had vindicated his stand for balanced representation and his call for rejection of the Soulbury constitution. The ACTC had sought and obtained a mandate to render 'responsive cooperation' to 'progressive-minded' Sinhala parties. This was a broad and general mandate which the ACTC was empowered to interpret in the best interest of the Ceylon Tamils.

This general election produced a minority government headed by Senanayake. However, the new Prime Minister moved to consolidate his position as soon as he had assumed office. The prospect of office had been used as bait to persuade a number of Independent MPs to help him secure a slim majority in the House of Representatives. The

ACTC did not seek to participate in the formation of the Senanayake government, but instead was involved in the abortive 'Yamuna talks' at which H. Sri Nissanka, KC, MP, sought to form a united front which could defeat Senanayake on the Speech from the Throne and thereafter at the division on the address of thanks. However, the 'Yamuna talks' were doomed from the start because the participants could not agree on a common programme for an alternative government and, more important, Senanayake held in reserve the weapon of dissolution of Parliament if he were defeated. The ACTC found itself isolated, and Ponnambalam and its other members decided to sit on the Opposition benches.

After the 1947 general election, a close associate of Senanayake, E. A. P. Wijeyeratne, wrote a letter to Chelvanayakam, now deputy leader of the ACTC, inviting him to join and cooperate in the construction of the new government.⁴ This was an obvious move to disrupt the ACTC. Chelvanayakam did not rise to the bait, and the ACTC remained a consolidated party. However, pressures were building up from collaborationist Ceylon Tamils for Ponnambalam to negotiate entry into the Senanayake government. These bore fruit with Ponnambalam's acceptance of the portfolio of industries, industrial research and fisheries in July 1948.⁵ This action signalled the break-up of the ACTC. Chelvanayakam and his parliamentary supporters C. Vanniasingham and Senator E. M. V. Naganthan opposed the majority decision of the ACTC parliamentary group to join the Senanayake government.

In the ensuing dispute, Ponnambalam alleged that Chelvanayakam's opposition arose from Senanayake's unwillingness to appoint him to his cabinet — something of which Chelvanayakam denied all knowledge. Vanniasingham stated at public meetings that pressure had been exerted on Chelvanayakam to accept a cabinet post by prominent personalities including his close friend, the eminent leader of the unofficial bar H. V. Perera, KC. Ponnambalam persisted in his version, and Senanayake added fuel to the fire by saying in a speech that he feared 'lean and hungry-looking men' such as Chelvanayakam.

In the continuing controversy carried on for several months in the correspondence columns of the *Ceylon Daily News*, Ponnambalam alleged that Chelvanayakam had chided him soon after the 1947 general election results were announced for his failure to rush to Colombo and negotiate with Senanayake for ACTC participation in the formation of his government.⁵ Chelvanayakam denied the

4. *Chelvanayakam file*.

5. *Ceylon Daily News* (hereafter *CDN*), 26 July 1949.

charge, but insisted that Ponnambalam should have obtained the pre-conditions for such participation, which Senanayake would not have accepted.

Ponnambalam's decision was not unique to him; it was a collective act on the part of Ceylon Tamils who advocated cooperation, at the élite and middle-class level, between Sinhalese and Tamils. He thus did not feel under pressure to secure the pre-conditions on which Chelvanayakam insisted. The whole episode indicated the absence in the Tamil community of a consistent and coherent political philosophy or a sense of its goals. The Ceylon Tamils as a community had long been riven by social, regional and political differences, and by this time they had reached the stage of being dependent on the conservative Sinhalese leadership for economic benefits for the Tamil areas and security in public employment. They had reconciled themselves to being a minority in the Ceylonese polity, and this self-perception was confirmed when the electorate failed to support Chelvanayakam and his ITAK/FP⁶ at the general election of 1952. Chelvanayakam was even defeated in his own constituency. To make doubly certain, as it were, that the Ceylon Tamils had forgotten the anger they had felt towards those who voted in the State Council for the Soulbury constitution in 1945, S. Natesan, one of the pro-Senanayake State Councillors, was returned to the constituency which had refused to endorse him in 1947 and elected Chelvanayakam instead.

It was at the point when G. G. Ponnambalam left their national cause for office in the Senanayake government that Chelvanayakam offered the Tamil people of Ceylon a political alternative. Although Ponnambalam was condemned by Chelvanayakam and his supporters for his 'betrayal' and he was castigated on platforms as a traitor to the Tamils, he represented, as we have seen, a sizeable body of Ceylon Tamil thinking at the time. Thus there was truth in Chelvanayakam's observation that Ponnambalam's action was evidence that the Ceylon Tamils could be 'misled and deceived'. They realised their misjudgement later with hindsight when they felt the full fury of the Sinhala movement of the 1950s and its surge towards establishing first its own dominance and thereafter the dominance of the Sinhala Buddhist state.

Chelvanayakam's remarkable prescience can be seen in his statements on the dangers ahead even when he and Ponnambalam were still working together. As early as 1 July 1947, he said at a Tamil conference in Jaffna: 'The Tamil language is in danger of being annihilated. The Sinhalese leaders are plotting to make Sinhala the

6. The 'ITAK' and 'FP' designations were used interchangeably but in this work we shall hereafter use 'FP' only to avoid possible confusion.

only official language in the country, and to relegate Tamil to the Northern and Eastern Provinces and make it a purely local language.⁷ And on 21 July he made this accurate assessment of D. S. Senanayake's United National Party: 'The UNP is nothing more than a congregation of arch-communalists whose past antics and present-day activities tend to disrupt the harmonious relations that have existed among the different communities in the Island.'⁸ In view of its policy of depriving the Indian Tamil plantation workers of citizenship in 1948 and 1949, its *volte face* in 1955 from a policy of parity for the two languages to one of Sinhala as the only official language, its vicious campaign against the Bandaranaike-Chelvanayakam Pact of 1957, and the role of UNP governments in the phase after 1977 in countenancing pogroms against the Tamils, not to mention its murderous air-attacks against Tamil civilians in the Jaffna peninsula, Chelvanayakam in 1947 could scarcely have been closer to the truth.

On 10 December 1948, at the second reading of the Indian Residents (Citizenship) Bill in Parliament, Chelvanayakam with a seer's insight criticised Senanayake for presenting a bill which would adversely affect 'the Tamils, the Indians and the Muslims'. 'He is not hitting us now directly,' he added, 'but when the language question comes up, which will be the next one to follow in this series of legislation, we will know where we stand. Perhaps that will not be the end of it.'⁹ It is true that Senanayake was committed to the continuation of English, but had he lived in the difficult times when this became a major issue, he could not, as a politician wanting to retain power, have resisted the forces of Sinhala-language chauvinism and of Buddhism which were fast gaining momentum. In any event, his successors in the UNP abandoned the concept of a multi-ethnic state in favour of a Sinhala Buddhist-dominated one in the years after Senanayake's death in March 1952.

However, in the face of this grave assault on the numerical representation in Parliament of hill country Tamils, a significant component of the Tamil population, Chelvanayakam decided to take up arms against a sea of troubles. His first impulse was 'to quit politics'¹⁰ but on reflection he decided to take it to his own people, 'to complain to them' of the ACTC's 'betrayal' and suggest a means of protecting themselves. Ponnambalam, he alleged, had sacrificed 'everything that the ACTC stood for' as well as 'the honour and respect of the Tamil people'.

7. *Ibid.*, 20 May 1949.

8. From the Jaffna-based English weekly *Hindu Organ*, 22 July 1947.

9. See proceedings of *Parliamentary Debates* (House of Representatives) of that date.

10. *CDN*, 20 May 1949.

In a few more months, the air was full of rumours that a crisis was at hand, and indeed it was to break out in full force some five years later. Chelvanayakam felt that it was his responsibility to plan to confront the crisis. Addressing the youth movement in Jaffna in December 1948, he rejected the popular notion that there 'was not room in politics for honest men'.¹¹ He urged his listeners 'to arm themselves with moral considerations'. He was aware that the Tamil people 'were weak, without resources and small in number'; they 'could only win by strength of character and use of moral force'. These people, his people, he told the Minister of Justice, 'could not be cheated'.¹²

However he mistakenly believed that his party's objectives would be achieved in five to ten years, little anticipating the tenacity of Sinhala resistance. If the Pact Chelvanayakam concluded with S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike in July 1957 was truly a milestone on the way to the ultimate destination, it did fall within his five-to-ten-year period, but the Pact was not to be and years of terrible suffering for the Tamil community followed. At this stage, when he met with a setback to his political career, his 'attachment to the Ceylon Tamil culture came much closer to a true Tamil nationalism, and his gloomy views and oracular attitude proclaimed him the heir to the aged Ponnambalam Arunachalam who had turned in his bitterness from the ideal of a United Lanka to the concept of a Tamilnad or Pan-Tamilian state in his solstitial years'.¹³ At this early phase of his political career, Chelvanayakam approximated to Sir Ponnambalam Arunachalam's thinking, even if unconsciously. In a public speech at Jaffna a few months after leaving the ACTC, he spoke of his concept of a single united Tamil nation with 'no division into Indian Tamils and Ceylon Tamils'. He added that 'all Tamils settled in Ceylon formed one nation'.¹⁴

He spent the next few years, 1948 to 1955, in the political wilderness while G. G. Ponnambalam, the ACTC chief, took the limelight. Even so, Ponnambalam's path was not smooth: in 1951 a Dutchman, Commander Du Cane, alleged that in his capacity as Minister of Industries Industrial Research and Fisheries, Ponnambalam had solicited 'inducements' from him. The case was not proven and left in the air; and when Ponnambalam's leader, D. S. Senanayake, made the closing speech in a debate on the subject in Parliament, he did not affirm that he had faith in his minister, or say anything tending to exculpate

11. *CDN*, 30 Dec. 1948.

12. *CDN*, 28 Aug. 1950.

13. Jane Russell, *op. cit.*, pp. 321-2.

14. *CDN*, 26 April 1949.

him. Worse was to follow when Dudley Senanayake, the son and heir of D. S. Senanayake and Prime Minister since 1952, resigned owing to ill-health in October 1953. Ponnambalam 'backed the wrong horse' in the earlier struggle for the succession between Dudley and the dead leader's nephew Sir John Kotelawala, and when it fell to Sir John to reconstitute the cabinet in October 1953, he was excluded. Ponnambalam now found himself in the wilderness while his opponent Chelvanayakam heaped scorn on a man who had placed such faith in the Sinhala traditional leadership.

More important, the years 1950-5 marked the crucial turning-point for a man who had viewed himself as the guardian of the Tamil interest. When the Tamil people became aware of the impending dangers threatening them, they turned increasingly to Chelvanayakam. He was now thought of as a prophet, and indeed he had constantly warned through the years of the threat of Sinhala hegemonism. But now he was called on to do something much harder, namely to be their saviour and protector — not in Parliament but in a wider setting. For his part, he tried at first to instill principles rather than let people rely on personalities. Thus at Batticaloa in early 1956: 'A Ponnambalam, a Suntheralingam or a Chelvanayakam are mere shadows in the political firmament. What matter are the policies of a party and a determination to do or die for principles. . . .'¹⁵ At about the same time he exhorted the Tamils to 'rely on their own unity, and determination to win their freedom'. This was in response to allegations that his party was involved with outside forces such as the Indian DMK¹⁶ and the 'We Tamil Movement'. He said that he was 'not dependent on the support of others'.

In July 1955, almost a year before he came to be hailed as the Tamil nation's leader in their hour of crisis, Chelvanayakam blamed the

15. *CDN*, 16 April and 26 May 1956.

16. DMK (*Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam* — Dravidian Progressive Association) started in 1944 as a movement for social reform directed against Brahmin domination, as well as for a separate state of *Dravidasthan* or *Dravidam* directed against Hindi domination from North India. It was then the *Dravida Kazhagam* (DK). In 1949, C. N. Annadurai split away to form the DMK, which became increasingly powerful under his leadership — he died in 1959. His successor M. Karunanidhi led the party till the new Anna(durai) DMK (ADMK) led by the popular film actor M. G. Ramachandran split away. In 1962, owing to the Chinese invasion and an amendment against secession in the Indian constitution, the DMK changed its stance to greater regional autonomy in a loose federation. Nevertheless both DMKs are potentially secessionist. They supported Chelvanayakam and his FP and TULF and later the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. (On DMK nationalism see M. R. Bennett, *The Politics of Cultural Tamil Nationalism in South India* (Princeton University Press, 1976), and R. L. Hardgrave and S. L. Kochanek, *India: Government and Politics in a Developing Nation* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1986).)

ACTC MPs for failing to protest at the legislation against the Indian Tamils, which had allowed the government to 'go a step further' and carry out Sinhalese colonisation of Tamil areas.¹⁷ This was 'high-handed political aggression'. One race, he said, 'should not encroach upon the land of another race living in the same country'. In January 1956, just three months before the general election that made him leader of the Tamil nation, he was emphatic that the Sinhalese, after independence, had 'proceeded to plunder Tamil lands by colonising the rich agricultural districts in Tamil provinces like Gal Oya and Kantalai . . . which even Sinhalese kings during the days of their most autocratic rule never dared to do. [. . .] The Tamils held these provinces for the last three thousand years and now the Sinhalese, not satisfied with the seven provinces they occupy, are trying to usurp our lands as well. . . .'¹⁸

Chelvanayakam thus provided a historical foundation for his theory of 'the traditional Tamil homelands'. It might be noted that he avoided such phrases as '*angkal nadu*' (our land) or the usual '*angkal tai nadu*' (our motherland) or the characteristic '*junpoothi*' (fatherland); for whatever reason he used the safe term 'traditional Tamil homeland'.

Chelvanayakam correctly anticipated the moves of the Sinhala majority: first, decitizenisation of Indians, parallel with deprivation of territories in the traditional Tamil homeland, followed by the proposal to impose Sinhala as the only official language, to which would be added the statement, constitutionally entrenched, that Buddhism be given the 'foremost place'. He questioned the moral right of the Sinhalese to exercise rule over the Tamils, and a few weeks before the general election of 1956 he argued that the three Sinhalese prime ministers D.S. Senanayake, Dudley Senanayake and Sir John Kotelawala had betrayed the trust reposed in them by the British decolonisers:¹⁹ 'The Britishers, relying on the Sinhalese leaders to be trustworthy men who would not oppress the minority section, transferred the responsibility of the government to them. The Sinhalese, taking advantage of their numerical strength, denied the Tamils their rights.'²⁰ From this pronouncement emerged the subsequent Tamil claim to the right of self-determination.

On the last day of 1954, he alerted an audience at Vaddukoddai, a Tamil city in the Jaffna peninsula, to the serious crisis impending: 'Almost every Tamil has now accepted that the position of the Tamil

17. *Times of Ceylon*, 17 July 1955.

18. *Ibid.*, 16 Jan. 1956.

19. *CDN*, 27 March 1956.

20. *Ibid.*

people is precarious. . . . But people are confused as to how the situation can be remedied. The remedy has also been advanced by our party all along and that is autonomy for the Tamil-speaking people in their areas.' The 'precariousness' and 'confusion' which he identified were undoubtedly the ingredients of a crisis, and he was certain that 'a large section of the Tamil-speaking people accepted federalism as a solution'. '[The] time-honoured method in politics adopted in all the countries of the world is for people with common ideas to combine into a political party and work out a solution.'²¹

There was a great hue and cry for a united front of all Tamil political parties to brace themselves against the impending storm. Rejecting the united front thesis, he held that 'there can never be in any country hundred per cent unanimity of opinion. In fact that is not wanted. What is more important is that workers in a party should be one hundred per cent loyal to each other and to their ideals.'

While he was conscious of the heavy weather that lay ahead, Chelvanayakam was sure in his own mind that the party he led could pilot the people through the storm, and that the ultimate destination lay in regional autonomy in a federal set-up. He was also aware by this time that the role of protector of his people had fallen to him — due, as it seemed, to the forces of history.

21. *CDN*, 3 Jan. 1955.

APPRENTICE YEARS IN POLITICS, 1947-1956

After the general election of 1947, the All Ceylon Tamil Congress, led by G. G. Ponnambalam, was victorious, and Ponnambalam entertained vague hopes of an alternative government. S. J. V. Chelvanayakam, who had assumed the role of guardian of the Tamil national interests with a remarkable clarity of vision, hoped that Ponnambalam would discharge his responsibilities to the Tamil people. He himself would willingly have functioned as his deputy and chief lieutenant, and he hoped that he would perform reliably and effectively in that role. This was not to be.

For the Ceylon Tamils the controversial issues of the first three years of independence were those relating to a satisfactory resolution to the question of a national flag for the new state, proper standards for the granting of citizenship and voting rights (this involved nearly a million hill country Tamils of recent Indian origin), acceptance of both Sinhalese and Tamil as the official languages of the state, and the stopping of state-aided colonisation by Sinhalese of the traditional homelands of the Tamil-speaking peoples.

Chelvanayakam had more far-reaching pre-conditions for the settlement of Tamil demands than Ponnambalam, and the differences between them were aired just as they were elected to Parliament. Neither leader was combative on a public platform. Chelvanayakam preferred to play an unassuming role, and Ponnambalam never laid all his cards on the table, in the belief that after entering the cabinet he could influence its decision-making. He was tired of sitting on the opposition benches, which he had done since his election to the State Council in 1934. Chelvanayakam, on the other hand, was only elected to Parliament for the first time in 1947.

Thus at independence there were three strands of Tamil opinion. There was the ACTC, which was already showing signs of a split between the Ponnambalam and Chelvanayakam wings. At this point, Ponnambalam's vague and general formulation of 'responsive co-operation' with the Sinhalese had an appeal. The differences in approach between the two Tamil leaders were hinted at in their speeches after Ponnambalam emerged as the winner in the contest for the Jaffna seat at the general election of 1947. While the different approaches of the two men reflected the two prevailing schools of Tamil opinion, Ponnambalam's thinking was close to that of the

Tamils in Colombo and in the north and east who supported the policies of the United National Party (UNP) government of D. S. Senanayake. According to Chelvanayakam's thought-processes, the Tamil problem required a radical solution, and he knew that with a leader like D. S. Senanayake the UNP would not be helpful. At the same time he marked himself off distinctly from the Marxists, and quite early in his career, after winning his seat at the 1947 general election, announced that he would 'not be guided by advice' from the defeated Trotskyist, P. Nagalingam,¹ thus reflecting the innate conservatism of the 'Jaffna man'. He was committed to the position that the Tamils were a distinct nationality, who needed to define the parameters of their felt nationalism. He did not think they should integrate completely with the Sinhala people, and thus parted company with Ponnambalam and other sections of Tamil opinion who advocated conditional cooperation with the Sinhala-dominated UNP.

On 19 June 1948 the ACTC General Council unanimously adopted a resolution giving Ponnambalam the 'green light'. Specifically it approved 'any course of action which the Congress Parliamentary group might decide to take in the present political situation'.² However, he hesitated to take any action for two months until 23 August, one reason being the opposition of Chelvanayakam and his two parliamentary colleagues, E. M. V. Naganathan and C. Vanniasingham, who wanted a prior settlement of the outstanding issues.

Chelvanayakam looked to India for help. In a speech at Trincomalee some two months after his election to Parliament, he pointed out that the Indian leaders had had to struggle for many years to get their independence but 'it was intriguing that independence should be given to Ceylon when no request was made for it'.³ This, he asserted, was because of 'the fear that Leftists were beginning to dominate south Ceylon and that north Ceylon might be influenced by India'.⁴ He referred to the great strategic naval port of Trincomalee, and asked his audience what would be their attitude 'if Nehru asked for the Trincomalee naval base for the defence of India'.⁵ In explaining why the ACTC had not accepted office in the Senanayake government, he asked: 'Would you like us to share the government with those who are hostile to our Indian neighbours?'⁶ There were suggestions that

1. *CDN*, 19 Sept. 1947.

2. Editorial ('The Tamil Congress Decision') in *CDN*, 22 June 1948.

3. *CDN*, 19 Nov. 1947.

4. This view is confirmed in Sir Charles Jeffries' *Ceylon: The Path to Independence* (London: Pall Mall Press, 1962) and by Sir Ivor Jennings in the *Jennings Archives*, Institute of Commonwealth Studies, London.

5. See *Chelvanayakam file* and for immediate reference *CDN*, 19 Nov. 1947.

6. *Chelvanayakam file*; also *CDN*, 4 Nov. 1947.

Chelvanayakam advocated a federation with India, but he denied this on 26 November 1947 in the House of Representatives.⁷ There were some sharp public exchanges, but nonetheless the idea of a federation of South Asian states was discussed seriously.⁸ On 20 April 1948 the *Ceylon Daily News* highlighted it in an editorial headed 'Federation of Southern Asia', but gave the opinion that the advantages would not outweigh the demerits. The plan went no further.

Shortly after the general election in September 1947, Chelvanayakam raised fundamental issues at a reception for ACTC MPs in Trincomalee. He spurned 'the loaves of office' and mocked D. S. Senanayake for wanting 'Tamil ministers in his Cabinet merely as showpieces'; the Prime Minister did not want 'a real settlement with the Tamils'. He added that 'the present situation was such that the Tamils would have to decide whether they should demand a federal government'.⁹ However, the Tamil mood of the times was for the ACTC to negotiate for places in the Cabinet. Barely a week later, on 26 November 1947, he went a step further from his stance on federalism. In moving an amendment to the first Address of Thanks of the first Parliament, he asked 'why the Tamils should not have the right to secede from the rest of the country if they desired to do so'.¹⁰

If 1947 saw straws in the wind, 1948 was an uncertain year. The Chief Justice, Sir John Howard, caught the trend of coming events in a prize-day speech at Jaffna College, when he said that at a time when Ceylon was still viewed as 'Arcady', the 'paradise isle' etc., it was clear that its future was grim in spite of having attained independence. Ceylon was 'crying for leadership' and it had to look to the young.¹¹ On the other hand the future Governor-General Lord Soulbury, who had said in October 1947 that the island possessed all the sinews for a successful parliamentary democracy, was optimistic.¹²

The Prime Minister, D. S. Senanayake, struck a responsive chord among the Colombo Tamils who began to show disquiet with the politics of the Tamil Congress in general, and with the platform of 'division, secession and federation' advocated by Chelvanayakam. These people called themselves 'the All-Ceylon Nationalist Tamils', and among their associates were national-minded Tamils from Jaffna, prominent members of the Northern Province Teachers' Association such as S. Handy Perinpanayagam, K. Nesiah and A. E. Tamber; S. Sivasubramaniam, the Colombo solicitor; C. Thanabalasingham,

7. Report in *Parliamentary Debates* (House of Representatives), 26 Nov. 1947.

8. See *Chelvanayakam file*.

9. *Ibid.*

10. *Parliamentary Debates* (House of Representatives), 26 Nov. 1947.

11. *CDN*, 15 Mar. 1948.

12. Speech to Royal Empire Society, London, in October 1947.

the Trotskyist LSSP organiser for the Northern Province; and a few of a UNP frame of mind such as A. C. Kanagasingham, A. I. Rajasingham, R. N. Sivapragasam and S. R. Kanaganayagam, all of them notables from the north. This group of Tamils had a resolution on their agenda for a meeting to be held on 30 November 1947, which would have condemned the proposed federal solution on the grounds that it might result in a division of the country or part of it seceding. In the end the meeting was wrecked, allegedly by members of the ACTC,¹³ and finally held on 20 March 1948.

At this time the question of Ceylon's national flag became a contentious issue. A resolution had been moved in Parliament that the Lion flag be accepted as the official flag for the new state. The MPs of the ACTC resolutely opposed the motion, and Chelvanayakam moved an amendment in Parliament on 16 January 1948 that 'the official national flags of Ceylon should be the Lion flag of the Sinhalese, the Nandi flag of the Tamils and the Crescent and Star flag of the Muslims.'¹⁴ Eventually the Prime Minister referred the matter to a committee of both houses of Parliament, its Tamil members being G. G. Ponnambalam and S. Nadesan, a member of the upper house and an eminent lawyer. The committee's compromise on the flag was accepted, but Nadesan wrote a dissenting opinion.

The year 1948 also foreshadowed the 'struggle for the succession' that would occur if the Prime Minister, as some influential quarters thought, wished to become Governor-General in the style of Lord Mountbatten in India or M. A. Jinnah in Pakistan. Senanayake was never enamoured of the prospect, and the *Ceylon Daily News*, in an officially inspired column on 21 February 1948, made his position plain.

It was disconcerting for opposition political parties, including the ACTC, that the island's left wing was rent with ideological differences. The possibility of an alternative government or a united front against the UNP at another general election was therefore nil. The largest left party, the Trotskyist LSSP (nine MPs) with N. M. Perera and Philip Gunawardene as its leaders, was contemptuous of the CP's pro-Moscow stance. Philip Gunawardene, the LSSP's secretary, declared at a meeting that his party would never form a united front with the CP (Moscow) because the latter was apt to change its policy so often.¹⁵

From the ACTC's position, these fine ideological distinctions were less important than the left's failure to coalesce and so provide an

13. Reported to me by Chelvanayakam on different occasions in 1947-8.

14. *Parliamentary Debates* (House of Representatives), 16 Jan. 1948.

15. Interview with Philip Gunawardene, 20 Oct. 1948.

alternative to the rapidly stabilising UNP, which now had sixty MPs in a House of 101 (of whom one had been elected Speaker). Up till the middle of 1950, the left even failed to agree on a Leader of the Opposition. In this context the ACTC had to confront reality squarely and determine whether it would join the UNP government or remain in opposition and develop a programme for an autonomous Tamil nation operating within a federal framework. Four ACTC MPs followed the majority decision to join the UNP in return for a single though significant ministerial portfolio (industries, industrial research and fisheries) and a parliamentary secretaryship. However, three (one of them a member of the second chamber) chose to defy the decision and, led by Chelvanayakam, formed their own party, the Ilankai Thamil Arasu Kadchi (ITAK) or Tamil Federal Freedom Party in December 1949.¹⁶ The position of the ACTC MP for Trincomalee was ambivalent. The *Ceylon Daily News* of 18 December 1948 reported that the Government Chief Whip, A. E. Goonesinha, had 'debarred' three ACTC MPs — S. Sivapalan, Chelvanayakam and C. Vanniasingham — from meetings of the government parliamentary party because they had voted against the Indian Residents' Citizenship Bill. Vanniasingham gave a sharp rejoinder when asked by Goonesinha for an explanation. This centred on the Indian citizenship question. According to Vanniasingham, the Prime Minister had met the ACTC MPs on 19 August 1948 and given them an assurance that bills relating to the issue of the hill country Tamils would be presented only after agreement with Jawaharlal Nehru, the Indian Prime Minister. The Chief Whip consulted the Prime Minister and replied that the latter had given 'no assurance to anybody about complete agreement between himself and Prime Minister Nehru on the Indian bill'.¹⁷ The strong opposition of these Ceylon Tamil MPs to the government's policies on the hill country Tamils was made clear when the Ceylon Tamil Minister of Trade and Commerce, C. Suntheralingam, a lifelong friend and adviser to D. S. Senanayake, walked out of the chamber when the division was called on the second reading of the Indian Residents' Citizenship Bill on 10 December 1948. The Prime Minister asked for an explanation from the minister, who resigned.¹⁸

For most of 1948 and 1949 Chelvanayakam and his colleagues laid the groundwork for sounding the Tamil public on their solution to the Tamil issue. His approach was to sow the seed in the conviction that it would fall on fertile ground. He had a plan, but it needed to be

16. Interview with Senator E. M. V. Naganathan, 10 July 1948.

17. Interview with C. Vanniasingham, 15 July 1948.

18. For the full record leading to the Minister's resignation and the Prime Minister's request for an explanation, see *CDN*, 14 Dec. 1948.

thought out anew from first principles, because all that he and others of his thinking stood for had crumbled with the decision of their leader Ponnambalam and his followers to cooperate with the UNP. Chelvanayakam in public speeches outlined his thoughts on nation-building.¹⁹ His group had a 'long-term plan and a short-term one', and to achieve the former it had to protect and build up the future of the Tamil linguistic group in Ceylon. At the same time he and his dissident parliamentary colleagues should look after the present needs of the people, the improvement of their living conditions and the providing of day-to-day necessities. In particular they were concerned in promoting agricultural production. Chelvanayakam thus thought and spoke as a nation-builder — he did not merely rouse the gut fears of a threatened minority.

Thus for a few months before launching the ITAK/FP in December 1949, Chelvanayakam functioned as a publicist for his ideas, and his parliamentary colleagues campaigned on similar lines. However, the gestation of a new political party took considerable thought and planning. Above all, the question of financing it would be a heavy burden and this in the end became mainly Chelvanayakam's responsibility. In the early stages his earnings in the courts would help to pay for the party's propaganda meetings. Already he provided the main financial support for the Tamil nationalist newspaper *Suthanthiran* (Freedom) — which, from being an organ of the ACTC, became the instrument of the new party.

Chelvanayakam and his parliamentary colleagues operated against the backdrop of a UNP government facing a spell of instability, since it was well known in political circles that S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike's exit from the government was only a matter of time. But the where-withal for an alternative government was significantly absent; as already mentioned, the three left-wing parties were hopelessly split. At best, Bandaranaike could weaken the government by his departure and force an early dissolution. His decision to cross the floor was welcomed as a step in the right direction, and Chelvanayakam himself wrote him a letter welcoming it as providing an alternative democratic focus to the political forces in the island.²⁰ Meanwhile, the Prime Minister's diabetic condition, which he neglected, was causing growing concern, and there was much speculation as to who could carry on as head of government in his place.

The months preceding and following the Tamil Congress's decision to join the Senanayake government witnessed the deployment by

19. As expressed by S. J. V. Chelvanayakam in several discussions with this writer during March 1949.

20. In *Chelvanayakam file*.

Ponnambalam and his ACTC of various strategies to justify their action. On 20 June 1948, Ponnambalam stated at a well-attended conference of delegates from every electorate in the Northern Province and Trincomalee at the Jaffna town hall that his 'considered view' and advice was that the Tamil community should 'accept the hand of fellowship that is offered without loss of honour or self-respect'.²¹ At this meeting dissidents were loudly warned that they would 'have their hands cut off' if they raised them in protest against the ACTC decision!

Ponnambalam made another political move with a clear ulterior motive. He requested the Prime Minister to assign the vacant portfolio to Chelvanayakam, saying that he, Ponnambalam, would await his turn. In the end, Ponnambalam declared to the Tamil public that the Prime Minister had preferred him and that Chelvanayakam was therefore acting from pique in turning the portfolio down. Senanayake was a politician of considerable acumen and was, besides, well informed of Chelvanayakam's preconditions for any kind of cooperation with the government. He had anticipated that Ponnambalam would be manipulable and offer no serious resistance.

On 15 February 1949, Chelvanayakam made a speech in his Kankasanturai constituency clearly outlining his plan of action.²² He declared that 'Tamil Ceylon must govern itself,' and enunciated for the first time 'the elementary right of small nations to have self-determination'. India, which he regarded as the spiritual mother of Ceylon and of the Tamils in particular, had 'attained real independence' whereas Ceylon has obtained 'imitation independence', in which the Tamils had no share. Here he was at one with the Ceylonese left wing, which alleged that D. S. Senanayake had obtained the island's independence on the basis of pre-conditions. He warned that 'the present position of the Tamils in Ceylon is dark and gloomy.' In an allusion to his federalist solution, he said: 'It is the duty of the leaders to present you a plan.' His speech caused disquiet in pro-government circles, and the *Ceylon Daily News* of 17 February 1949 criticised him and his lieutenant Dr E. M. V. Naganathan under the heading 'Lone Voices': 'The general public would refuse to accept that there is a Tamil Ceylon or a Sinhalese Ceylon,' it said, and 'No one would seriously recommend the artificial bifurcation of the Ceylonese nation particularly at a time when the rest of the world is forming international blocs and economic cultural unions.'

Despite an apparent calm, deepening fissures appeared in 1949. The prevailing political stability proved illusory. The health of the one

21. As reported in *CDN*, 21 June 1948.

22. *Chelvanayakam file*.

man who held the fabric together, D. S. Senanayake, was ebbing away and it was being asked who his successor could be. The two obvious contenders were Sir John Kotelawala (Prime Minister, 1953–6) and S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike, the heir-presumptive who realised that he was being edged out and left the government in 1951 to offer a democratic alternative in the centrist Sri Lanka Freedom Party which he formed in that year. The fact that Dudley Senanayake was his father's favoured successor was still unknown.

That year was marked by a continuing public debate between Chelvanayakam and Ponnambalam on the pros and cons of their respective positions. On 7 March Chelvanayakam reassured the Tamil public that a Tamil linguistic province could support itself as a federal unit.²³ Contending that the existing constitution had not been framed with their consent, he proposed a plebiscite to determine the form of government they would enjoy: this would secure the Tamil people's right to self-determination. In a subsequent public speech on 27 April he said that G. G. Ponnambalam had cabled to Whitehall on 20 November 1947 asking for the right of self-determination for the Tamils. Chelvanayakam was optimistic about the outcome of a referendum. If 'the great majority of Tamil representatives' persisted in demanding this right, the people of the south (the Sinhalese) 'must be expected to grant it'. 'If they do not', he said in early 1949, 'we can take our case to the nations of the world.' The internationalisation of the Tamil issue was in Chelvanayakam's mind, though generally it had not been thought of at that time. On the same occasion Vanniasingham, Chelvanayakam's deputy, provided the broad outlines of the form of federal structure:

What we, Tamils, want is a federal constitution made up of two linguistic provinces with a federal centre at Colombo dealing with only defence, foreign affairs and inter-provincial communications. Each linguistic province will be its master in all internal matters. . . .

Thus the FP, despite subsequent manifestos containing modifications of this statement, enunciated in 1949 the principles for resolving the problem of the two nations, Sinhalese and Tamil.

Chelvanayakam pressed his case and retained the initiative throughout the year; meanwhile, the ACTC kept issuing disclaimers. Ponnambalam confused the issues of federalism and secession.²⁴ Replying to his adversary on 11 April, he said that it was 'midsummer madness' for the Tamils to ask for the partition of the country and segregation of the different communities; but neither outcome was

23. *Ibid.*

24. Interview with Chelvanayakam, 26 April 1949.

envisaged in the type of federalism advocated by Chelvanayakam, who outlined the economic prospects for the envisaged Tamil Ceylon on 25 April: 'The land which is now in jungle was studded with ancient irrigation works of great magnitude, which when restored, would supply sufficient water for the cultivation of the whole area.' Without a federal system the Tamils, Chelvanayakam asserted, would remain 'a voiceless minority' living 'in an atmosphere of inferiority' with their self-confidence weakened and their leaders (the ACTC collaborators) 'losing their self-respect'.²⁵

Ponnambalam defended his position with various counter-arguments.²⁶ As he would reiterate with ample justification, the ACTC had nothing in common with the left parties which, as well as being 'hopelessly disunited', lacked the 'statesmanship' to participate in a left-centre combination in which event the ACTC could have 'formed an integral part'. Above all the left were not prepared to 'shed their programme of revolution'.

Ponnambalam grew increasingly bitter against Chelvanayakam, whom he rightly identified as his principal adversary. The battle was over leadership strategies. Chelvanayakam was to be given no quarter — otherwise, he could convince the Tamil people that they were being led into a blind alley. So at a public meeting in the Northern Province town of Mannar with its mixed population of Hindu Tamils, Tamil-speaking Muslims and Tamil Christians (mostly Catholics), Ponnambalam issued a challenge, daring Chelvanayakam to take the sense of any part of a fully representative meeting of his electorate. If the verdict went against Ponnambalam's decision to vote with Senanayake's government against the Indian Tamil population on the Indian Citizenship bill, he would resign, provided Chelvanayakam undertook to do the same if the verdict went against him.²⁷ Chelvanayakam was quick to reply in a letter published in the *Ceylon Daily News* of 16 June 1949, reminding Ponnambalam that he 'broke his signed pledge given to the Ceylon Indian Congress in 1947' (that he would be on their side on the citizenship question). However, in general the balance of Tamil opinion in 1949 seemed tilted in favour of Ponnambalam. He had the advantage of ministerial office and as a recognised leader among the Ceylon Tamils, he had the ear of the Prime Minister. The clashes between the ACTC and FP in these stages seemed like little more than minor skirmishes, certainly not open confrontations.

As the emerging leader of the anti-collaborationist forces,

25. *Chelvanayakam file*.

26. *CDN*, 21 June 1948.

27. *Ibid.*, 14 June 1949.

Chelvanayakam took his time to formulate an alternative strategy. While expounding the broad concept of federalism, he had to ward off the criticisms and attacks of his ACTC adversaries — who also made statements such as that the trains would not pass beyond the narrow isthmus of Elephant Pass which connects the whole Jaffna peninsula with the rest of the island. However, the problem for the FP was that the dangers that it foresaw had yet to materialise.

The controversy between the two wings of the ACTC ended on 28 August 1949 when Chelvanayakam and his followers announced in Jaffna that they planned to launch a new party. The party was formally inaugurated in Colombo on 18 December. At this first meeting, two subjects of immediate relevance were discussed. Senator Naganathan dealt with 'how the federal constitution for Ceylon can be attained', and V. Navaratnam, later one of the party's MPs, explored the economic implications of a federal constitution, seeking to refute the Communist charge that Jaffna was dependent on remittances from public and private sector employees in Colombo and functioned as 'an onion ball and green chillies economy'. The formation of the new party was followed a week later (4 September) by the General Council of the ACTC expelling Chelvanayakam and his parliamentary colleagues and requesting them to resign their seats.²⁸ Members of the Tamil middle class advised the FP 'to wait for a few years to work for the autonomy of the Tamil people' till the results of Ponnambalam's 'responsive cooperation' could be assessed. For Chelvanayakam it was an urgent question that had to be settled without delay: 'They could not wait one moment without fighting for the creation of the Tamil state', and he added: 'If we wait, it may be too late.'²⁹

Many in the Jaffna Tamil community were sceptical about the attitudes of the Eastern Province Tamils, in particular those of Batticaloa ('the trousered people of Batticaloa', as Chelvanayakam occasionally called them), but Chelvanayakam was not put off. He had already provided for the involvement of Eastern Province Tamils in his party's organisational structure. N. R. Rajavarothiam, a prominent Tamil citizen of Trincomalee in the Eastern Province, was elected to Parliament for Trincomalee constituency as a FP candidate in 1956 and thereafter held the seat till his death in 1963. He was elected vice-president of the party at its inaugural session in December 1949 at Chelvanayakam's suggestion. The Eastern Province Tamils now became partners in the federal movement and held senior positions, including that of president.

28. Interview with Chelvanayakam, 6 Sept. 1949.

29. *Ibid.*, 28 Sept. 1949.

From the beginning Chelvanayakam concentrated on (as he put it) 'indoctrinating' the Tamil-speaking people of the Eastern Province. He quickly realised that they constituted the frontline. A number of meetings were held in the province in November 1949, a few weeks before the launching of the party, at which Chelvanayakam said that the problem confronting them did not concern only Jaffna. The danger of Batticaloa ceasing to be Tamil-speaking was greater than for Jaffna, whose geographical position would make it the 'last to perish as a Tamil land in Ceylon'. He said that he did not share the opinion held in some quarters that the Eastern Province would not join in the campaign for the creation of a Tamil state in Ceylon. From what he had seen, Batticaloa was keen to safeguard the Tamil homeland in Ceylon, in the same way as any other part of Tamil Ceylon.

Thus Chelvanayakam was awakening Tamil nationalism; he thought that the Sinhalese would concede his demand for a plebiscite, failing which the 'Tamils must arm themselves with moral forces . . . must take on the weapons of truth and sacrifice'. These Gandhian weapons were to be the last resort. 'Ours is a campaign meant as much to raise our standard of national honour as it is to build up a state. It is a sacred task.'³⁰

The Ceylon Tamils of the UNP in Jaffna thought differently. S. Natesan, who was defeated by Chelvanayakam at the 1947 general election and in turn won against him in 1952, looked at the question in a pessimistic light. At a general meeting of the UNP (Jaffna branch) he asked if the Federalists were going to get a two-thirds majority in Parliament for this constitutional change. And were they sure of the support of the Tamils of the Eastern Province? But in private Natesan's views were not very different from those of Chelvanayakam, and as early as 1953 he told a relation of his that the only hope for the Ceylon Tamils was for India to intervene. He was right in that the FP could never hope to secure a two-thirds majority. But that party, when it held the balance of power in Parliament, gained sufficient influence to obtain its minimum demands from (Sinhala) prime ministers in 1957, 1960 and 1965.

Chelvanayakam, unlike his Tamil adversaries in the UNP, believed in his cause that a united Tamil nation could be built from among the different Tamil-speaking groups in the island. At a meeting in Jaffna on 27 June 1949 he had said that there could be no division into Indian Tamils and Ceylon Tamils; all Tamils settled in Ceylon formed one nation. When the government legislated against 'Indian Tamils', 'they really hit the Ceylon Tamils'. He tried to share his foresight with

30. *Chelvanayakam file.*

the Ceylon Tamils many of whom had gone into a slumber, believing that Ponnambalam's single ministerial portfolio would assure their future. At a meeting in Jaffna more than a year later, on 10 December 1950, he articulated the Tamil position yet more clearly. The Tamils of his way of thinking had felt 'a sense of frustration' when Ponnambalam 'abjectly surrendered' (by accepting office). His Federal Party now offered the alternative of a Tamil-speaking autonomous state. Chelvanayakam linked the Tamil language with the traditional Tamil homelands, these being the two most relevant components of statehood. These were parts of Ceylon which they inhabited, and they could therefore 'put up a fight for their existence' against the Senanayake government's plans for colonising 'other parts of the Eastern Province and parts of the Northern Province', having already 'started Sinhalese colonisation of Gal Oya' in the East.

Much more significant was Chelvanayakam's exposition of an unstated social compact between Sinhalese and Tamils at independence. Speaking in the House of Representatives on 18 October 1949 during the debate on the bill to disfranchise the Indian Tamils, he accused Senanayake's government, to which Britain had transferred power, of being 'guilty of a breach of promise in seeking to amend legislation on the basis of which the country had been granted her independence'. This went unnoticed at the time, but has since enabled Tamil publicists to claim that the island has moral and legal justification to return to its original state, that is separate Sinhalese and Tamil kingdoms, since the Sinhalese as the major party to the social contract had plainly violated the terms on which power had been transferred by Britain to D. S. Senanayake.

In 1950 the FP's propaganda activities were stepped up. These were conducted amid increasing signs of disintegration in the ranks of the UNP government, while at the same time there was disunity and splintering among the left. Thus there was little prospect of an alternative government. However, Chelvanayakam and his FP placed no faith in any of the Sinhala parties; the FP would strive for its goals singlehanded. But the signs were ominous, and from this time the campaign to establish Sinhala majoritarianism became increasingly manifest.

The year began with the FP staging a demonstration against the visit to Jaffna of the British Governor-General, Lord Soulbury. He had earlier headed the royal commission which recommended internal self-government to the benefit of the island's conservative Sinhala leadership. The party issued leaflets and exhibited posters and placards urging Tamils to boycott the visit. Chelvanayakam himself said at the meeting held to urge the boycott that Soulbury had callously injured the Tamil people and that there was no reason to rejoice over

his visit.³¹ This was the first and last time a Governor-General or President of the island paid a formal visit to the peninsula.

But the two problems looming on the horizon were the questions of the national flag and the adoption of the national languages as official languages. On 15 February 1950 the *Ceylon Daily News* reported that an 'honourable settlement' had been reached on the national flag, which would be the Sinhala lion, the symbol of the last Sinhala kingdom of Kandy before its seizure by the British in 1815, placed alongside green and saffron stripes representing the Muslim and Tamil minorities respectively. As a member of the National Flag Committee, Ponnambalam had advocated such a design, while the other Ceylon Tamil member, Senator S. Nadesan (an Independent), dissented on the grounds that the flag would be a 'symbol of our disunity . . . the lion flag is preserved in all its integrity, and outside that flag two stripes are allotted to represent the minorities.' The UNP Tamils and the ACTC accepted the compromise, but the FP disdained it and rejected the modified lion flag as the national flag.

Against a backdrop of continued splintering among the Marxist parties, Chelvanayakam and the FP carried on their campaign without relaxing or wavering, in the then mistaken belief that the Tamil voters would vote unequivocally for the 'federalising' of Ceylon. Chelvanayakam expected that even the UNP, by now disintegrating, could be made to concede the FP's demands in case it won. The FP calculated that the instability in Colombo would give them a better chance to exact concessions from Senanayake's weakened government, which was generally recognised as doomed.

The Federalists tried, without much success, to organise a boycott of the first ceremonial visit of the Prime Minister to Jaffna in early October. Chelvanayakam addressed a meeting there on 15 October and repeated a charge he had made in 1947 that the Prime Minister was a 'virtual dictator' under the existing constitution. A few black flags and anti-Senanayake placards were displayed, but failed to evoke much support. At one of the receptions in his honour, the Prime Minister referred to the Federalists' 'divisive' demand, and said 'United we stand, divided we fall' to enthusiastic applause.

In a letter published by the *Ceylon Daily News* of 5 October 1950, Chelvanayakam made a significant pronouncement on his concept of the traditional Tamil homelands. Official propaganda against the Federalist demand maintained that a federally autonomous Tamil region would require Sinhalese settlers in the federal unit to leave. 'I never said [at a meeting in Jaffna as alleged] the Sinhalese must be asked to quit our area,' he wrote, but added: 'We are opposed to

31. Confirmed in interview with Chelvanayakam, 24 Jan. 1950.

planned colonisation of Tamil-speaking areas ... with Sinhalese-speaking population.' He claimed that his party's emergence provided the Tamil-speaking people with the alternative of a Tamil-speaking state instead of being 'second-rate people with their numbers slowly dwindling' because of state-aided Sinhala colonisation of their traditional homelands.

The federal movement was gaining momentum in the north and east, but other controversial issues were emerging in relation to the Sinhala language and Sinhala Buddhism, which would in time cause clashes between the two communities, especially in the Sinhala areas, despite the surface calm. S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike was increasingly emphatic that the UNP of D. S. Senanayake could not be reformed from within. UNP apologists avoided this issue, but accused Bandaranaike of being influenced solely by his anxiety to succeed Senanayake.

Nevertheless three issues at this time were being canvassed among the Sinhala public. First, the Prime Minister in his third Independence Day anniversary broadcast on 4 February 1951 made the following statement:

Colonisation and land development activities are going at full speed and we are now able to bring in more [Sinhala] colonists to lands that have been fully developed and provided with irrigation and other facilities than we have ever done before.

Chelvanayakam's fears were thus fully justified. Secondly, it was also in 1951 that S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike resigned (on 12 July) both his portfolio of health and local government and his position as Leader of the House of Representatives. He crossed the floor and announced on 15 July that he planned to launch 'a middle party between the UNP on the extreme right and the Marxists on the extreme left'.³² So when Bandaranaike inaugurated the Sri Lanka Freedom Party in early September, the electorate for the first time had a democratic alternative.

Thirdly, although the electors now had a realistic democratic choice, there were forebodings of the chauvinistic path politics were to take. Bandaranaike sought to obtain a place in the firmament for the Sinhala language (Tamil was also briefly included) and for Sinhala Buddhism, and recognition for the Sinhala system of native medicine, *ayurveda*. He built his support base on the triad of the Sinhala Buddhist clergy, the Sinhala school teacher and the Sinhala native physician. He was thus clearly tapping the Sinhala substratum which both the UNP and the left wing had ignored. The anglophile establishment

32. *CDN*, 16 July 1951.

feared that he might make compromises if he had to enlist the support of the left in the formation of a government.

The tone was set in 1951 for the debate on the national languages, and the bitter controversy began which was to stiffen Tamil resistance and arouse the defensive Tamil nationalism of which Chelvanayakam and his associates in the FP were protagonists. On 15 February, months before Bandaranaike resigned and organised the new Sinhala Buddhist-oriented SLFP, a UNP member moved a private member's motion in the House of Representatives for 'the use of the national languages [Sinhalese and Tamil] in the conduct of all government business including the conduct of business in the House of Representatives'. In May the LSSP resolved that the national languages be adopted as 'official languages', and the government got out of the immediate impasse by appointing a commission of inquiry to report on the introduction of the national languages as the medium of administration. This commission set in train the events that culminated in the rider of dissent by its chairman, the retired Chief Justice Sir Arthur Wijeyewardene, contained in its final report (Sessional Paper XXI of 1954). The rider said that Sinhala should be recognised as the only official language.

It seemed as if the controversy over the national flag had finally been laid to rest when the House of Representatives decided to accept the recommendation of a parliamentary committee on its design (its committee was chaired by S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike, and G. G. Ponnambalam was a member and party to the compromise). However, Chelvanayakam opposed the decision. Remarking that such a question should have been based on 'the highest principles', he charged the Prime Minister with not paying attention to the 'representations made by the Tamil community to achieve the ideal of a united nation'; the government had ignored 'the Tamil community, the Muslim community and the other communities'. The question became an emotional one for the Prime Minister, since in a way he was going against the emerging Sinhala Buddhist mainstream. He urged the acceptance of the compromise. The proceedings of the House on 1 March 1951 were reported thus: 'Resting his hands on the heart, Senanayake said that in their hearts there was no difference or discrimination whether one was Tamil, Muslim or Burgher. . . .'

The Federal Party took the opportunity at this time to test Sinhalese attitudes to its demand for federal autonomy. One of the party's founders, E. M. V. Naganathan, moved a motion in the Senate on 14 March calling *inter alia* for the early convoking of a constituent assembly and 'the establishment of a federal system of government [a federal union of Ceylon] based on the bilingual composition of its population. . . .' The resolution failed, but it provided an opportunity

for the party to explain its stand on the question.

Towards the end of 1951, the appeal on the highly controversial Citizenship Acts of 1948 (no. 18) and 1949 (no. 48) came up for hearing before a divisional bench of three judges of the Supreme Court. The background was that G. S. N. Kodakan Pillai, unhappy with the decision of the Registering Officer, Mudannayake, to exclude him from the voters' register, had appealed on 8 March 1951 to the District Judge (also the Revising Officer) of Kegalla, N. Sivagnanasundram, who ruled on 2 July that the Acts of 1948 and 1949 were *ultra vires* the legislature and that the operative law was contained in the Ceylon (Parliamentary Elections) Order in Council of 1946. The Attorney-General Sir Alan Rose filed the appeal on behalf of the Registering Officer, Mudannayake, on 28 August and argued the case for the Ceylon government. Chelvanayakam, assisted by S. Nadesan and others, appeared for Pillai. Rose contended that there was an error of law in respect of the Revising Officer's decision on Act no. 48 of 1949 relating to the franchise; that error raised the question of whether the Revising Officer had jurisdiction to determine the outcome as well as the amount of the jurisdiction he could exercise. He sought writs of *certiorari* on the Revising Officer and the successful applicant, G. S. N. Kodakan Pillai, to have the Revising Officer's order quashed.³³

Chelvanayakam rested his case on two premises. First, the Citizenship Act was meant to cut off the Indians. If a statute in Ceylon was clear on the face of it but it had a hidden effect, then the Supreme Court was competent to consider evidence to ascertain the real purpose of the statute. In support of his argument, affidavits signed by an Indian Tamil elected member of the Ceylon Senate, Peri Sunderam, and two Ceylon Indian Congress MPs, Sauviamoorthy Thondaman and S.M. Subbiah, were produced; these contained statistics on the resident Indian Tamil population. Chelvanayakam's

33. Wittingly or unwittingly, Sir Ivor Jennings was drawn into the Indian litigation. Three documents in the Jennings Archives at the Institute of Commonwealth Studies, London, provide the evidence:

1. In Jennings' own handwriting, a rough script entitled 'Probable Distribution under Ministers' Scheme' assigns 12-15 seats to the 'Indian Tamils'. Jennings admitted in his writings that he was the scheme's author. The Indian Tamils had therefore been considered an integral part of the Ceylonese community. After the Kodakan Pillai judgement by District Judge Sivagnanasunderam, Jennings 'casually mentioned' to D. S. Senanayake that this judge's 'reasoning . . . was quite unsound'.

2. D. S. Senanayake in a letter to Jennings dated 5 July 1951 referred to this remark adding 'You mentioned to me casually that you would be in a position to meet the arguments'. Jennings complied.

3. There is a letter to Jennings from the succeeding Prime Minister, Dudley Senanayake, dated 2 July 1953, stating that he was 'greatly relieved' by the favourable 'Privy Council decision on *our case*'.

second premise was that Section 3 (1)(a) of the Ceylon (Parliamentary Elections) Amendment Act no. 48 of 1949, read with the Citizenship Act no. 18 of 1948, offended against Section 29 of the Ceylon Constitution and the Independence Orders in Council of 1946 and 1947. This Section was the guarantor of minority rights.

The bench of three judges (E. G. P. Jayatileke, a Sinhalese, M. F. S. Pulle, a Ceylon Tamil, and V. L. St. Clair Swan, a Burgher) delivered a unanimous judgment on 28 September quashing the order of the Revising Officer and declaring the Acts of 1948 and 1949 *intra vires* the legislature (*Mudannayake v. Sivagnasunderam*, 1952, 53 N.L.R. 25). They rejected the addition of the affidavits containing the statistical evidence as being irrelevant to the question. Their observations on the Indian Tamils and Section 29 of the Constitution suggested that in a keenly contested judicial decision, where the political executive could be seriously embarrassed, the court was likely, in the final instance, to come down on the side of the state.

The three judges in their conclusions made the following observations. First, 'what we have to ascertain is the necessary legal effect of the statutes'; they thereby refused to examine 'the ulterior effect, economically, socially or politically'. It did not matter what effects they produced in their actual operation. Secondly, the Attorney-General's contention on Section 29(2) of the Constitution was that 'the Indians are a contemplated community and that citizenship and the franchise are contemplated benefits' — this despite the fact that the Indians exercised the franchise before these acts and were assigned an ascertainable number of seats in the legislature by the Board of Ministers headed by D. S. Senanayake. And thirdly, it is tolerably clear that the object of the legislature was to confer the status of citizenship only on persons who were 'in some way intimately connected with the country for a substantial period of time' — yet these Indians had exercised the franchise at the pre-independence general elections of 1931, 1936 and 1947.

The palpability of all this was exposed by the Indian Prime Minister, Nehru, speaking on the actions of the Senanayake government in the Lok Sabha:

The reasons are . . . obvious. It has no rational element in it at all. The reasons are that the political fortunes of certain parties were likely to be affected by it and it is not for us to argue about it — and they laid stress on this.

Nehru was referring to the benefits that the UNP would derive, the adverse effect on the left-wing parties and the anxieties of the Ceylon Tamils. W. Howard Wriggins observed:

. . . for the communally conscious [Sinhalese], the linguistic affinity of the estate workers with the Ceylon Tamils raised in some minds the possibility of

a Tamil alliance for concerted political action against the Sinhalese community, should communal divisions emerge as politically important in the future.³⁴

The India question was not allowed to rest until steps towards its satisfactory resolution were enacted in pacts between India and Ceylon in the 1960s and '70s and by pressure exercised by the Indian Tamil leader Thondaman as a cabinet minister in 1977 and thereafter, which resulted in legislation to return the franchise to a large number of stateless Indians who had been denied it in 1948 and 1949.

However, for the Federal Party the most absorbing issue in 1952 was the outcome of the general election called in March by the new Prime Minister, Dudley Senanayake. The FP contested all the seats in the Jaffna peninsula but only one (Trincomalee) out of seven in the Eastern Province. A sympathiser was supported in Batticaloa constituency in the Eastern Province, but he joined the victorious UNP after the elections. Chelvanayakam believed that victory for his party in the peninsula would give him the mandate to claim federal autonomy, the assumption being that this densely-populated area was where the majority of Ceylon Tamils lived. It was also generally accepted among all Tamils that Jaffna was their heartland and that their view should therefore prevail.

At least three significant events occurred in 1952. First was the death of the Prime Minister, D. S. Senanayake. His long-drawn-out diabetic illness had been concealed from all but his closest circle — the Governor-General Lord Soulbury, Dudley Senanayake his son and designated heir and a few other family members, and the Lake House press barons, Esmond Wickremasinghe and L. M. D. de Silva, QC, who were expected to ensure the succession for Dudley Senanayake.

Secondly, the struggle for the succession after D. S. Senanayake had a bearing on Tamil politics. G. G. Ponnambalam, with the Tamil Congress, gave open support to the Dudley Senanayake faction in the UNP, and he was reappointed to his portfolio by Dudley Senanayake. However, his support for Dudley left the rival claimant to the office of Prime Minister, Sir John Kotelawala, embittered. Ponnambalam's ministerial career came to its expected end in October 1953, when Kotelawala succeeded Dudley Senanayake as Prime Minister. He was removed shortly afterwards, and thereafter the fortunes of his Tamil Congress waned.

Lastly, the old question of where the Tamil Congress stood in the configuration of the island's political forces arose especially during the

34. W. Howard Wriggins, *Ceylon: Dilemmas of a New Nation* (Princeton University Press, 1960), pp. 223-4.

general election of 1952. The political correspondent of the *Ceylon Daily News*, voicing the views of the higher echelons of the UNP, asked 'Why cannot the Tamil Congress become a Tamil branch of the UNP?'³⁵ But Ponnambalam, to guard his ranks from defections to the FP, insisted on maintaining the separateness of his organisation. He appealed to the Tamil electors on 16 April 1952 that they should 'support a government headed by Dudley Senanayake'. He explained in the same speech that the Tamil people had to decide either 'to live on terms of perpetual hostility with the Sinhalese, or agree to differ on certain points but decide to carry on as one people and as heirs to a common heritage'. He commended the latter course.³⁶ Chelvanayakam claimed at the start of the election campaign on 18 April that 'if the Tamil-speaking constituencies return Federalist candidates, it will be an alternative to a plebiscite and it will convince the Sinhalese people and the whole world that the Tamils are determined to be free. . . . If the Tamils show their determination to be free, no one can keep them down.' In support of this statement, it was said that some Independent candidates in the Eastern Province had pledged their allegiance to his party.

The assertion in this message was repeated by Chelvanayakam and his party colleagues throughout this phase. On 12 March 1952, in an address to the Muslim League Senate on 'the Present Political Situation', Chelvanayakam said that the forthcoming general election would 'to some extent be an index' as to 'whether the Tamil community follow such of their leaders who have surrendered . . . to the group in power' or — a clear reference to his own party — 'those of them who have still the guts to fight for what they value'. People like D.S. Senanayake and 'even' S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike (now in opposition), he said, sometimes thought that the minority communities did not exist; he blamed the UNP for not 'coordinating all the different political groups in the country', and thus failing to solve the communal problem. As for the Marxist leaders and parties (i.e. the LSSP and CP), they recognised the existence of the minority communities but their solution to the problem was on the basis of 'their economic theories'.³⁷

At a meeting in Colombo, when Amirthalingam alleged that Sinhalese peasants were being settled in the border area of Vavuniya in the Northern Province, he was greeted by sections of his Tamil audience with cries of '*poi*' (lies) and counter-cries of '*poi-illai*' (not lies). On this same occasion, Chelvanayakam expressed keenness for

35. *CDN*, 7 June 1952.

36. Confirmed in interview with Chelvanayakam, 17 April 1952.

37. *CDN*, 13 March 1952.

the Yugoslav model of a federal state which, he claimed, allowed for political autonomy for linguistic groups which would otherwise perpetually wage war against each other. (In retrospect this can be seen to have been an inauspicious model.)

At a meeting in the Tamil-speaking Muslim area of Jaffna town, C. Vanniasingham, MP, explained to his audience the steps that had led Muhammad Ali Jinnah to demand the creation of a separate state of Pakistan for India's Muslims.³⁸ The Indian National Congress had always been late in conceding the preceding set of moderate Muslim demands. Vanniasingham said that he hoped the leaders of the majority community in Ceylon would realise how much better it would be to concede the demand of the Tamil-speaking people for a federal constitution with grace; if that demand went unheeded, they might be creating 'another Pakistan in Ceylon'. Statements such as these made it clear that the new party and its leaders were dedicated to achieving their goals and were not just another grouping.

About this time, G. G. Ponnambalam launched his election campaign, concentrating his attack on the Tamil designation of the FP, '*Ilankai Tamil Arasu Kadchi*' (ITAK). He contended that *Arasu* implied a separate state, not an autonomous region in a federal set-up. At a mass meeting in Chavakachcheri (Jaffna), Ponnambalam harried Chelvanayakam on the differences in meaning between the English and Tamil names of his party, and accused him of 'attempting to foist on the Tamil people a party whose very name shows that it was formed to deceive and mislead the people. The words "*Tamil Arasu*" . . . connote an entity clothed with the absolute attributes of sovereignty.' Ponnambalam went to the heart of the Federalist dilemma when he accused the FP of stirring up the emotions of the Tamil people while at the same time seeking through its English designation a resolution of the problem with the Sinhala leadership.

However, the Tamil defensive nationalism which was being awakened did have as a reserve weapon in its armoury the possibility of switching the goals of the movement from federal autonomy to independent statehood should the former fail. Chelvanayakam implied this when he replied to Ponnambalam that '*Tamil Arasu*' meant a Tamil state, whether sovereign or autonomous. He added that 'the Federal Party' was not the party's name but merely an 'explanatory note'.³⁸ Ponnambalam did not see the party in this context, but alleged that its campaign was to 'endorse the demand for a provincial council', which he insisted contemptuously would be 'something bigger than any of our urban councils or municipalities'.³⁹

38. *Chelvanayakam file*.

39. Reported in *CDN*, 21 April 1952.

Ponnambalam made a second and more serious allegation about Chelvanayakam's motives: 'Chelvanayakam, who was willing to accept one of two ministries, some months later when it was certain that he was unacceptable to the Prime Minister, broke away with one other member. . . .'⁴⁰ At an election meeting in Nallur (Jaffna) on 16 May, Chelvanayakam responded that, far from being willing to accept a portfolio from D.S. Senanayake, he had given a definite refusal, to the extent that Ponnambalam 'went asking common friends to persuade me to accept a ministry'. He added: 'If the late Senanayake thought that I was not a suitable colleague . . . he had judged me correctly. Shrewd observer that he was, [he] must have known that I would not surrender the Tamil people's rights . . . Ponnambalam was prepared to surrender the rights of the Tamil people for a ministry whereas I was not prepared to do so. . . .'⁴¹

The UNP's lone candidate in the Northern Province, S. Natesan, campaigned on the basis of his local reputation and influence: he had been the principal of a leading educational institution, Parameshwara College, and was the son-in-law of a renowned former Ceylon Tamil leader, Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan.

On this occasion Chelvanayakam did not spend as much time visiting his constituents as usual, but set about explaining to all Tamil-speaking peoples the dangers confronting them and the need to embrace federalism as a method of containing Sinhala majoritarianism. The electors of Kankasanturai (Chelvanayakam's constituency) felt that he was neglecting them, while he expended most of his energy 'indoctrinating' the Eastern Province. Equally important was the prevailing rumour that Natesan, his rival in the constituency, would definitely obtain a cabinet portfolio if he were elected. His constituents naturally thought they would benefit from the patronage that would then be at his disposal.

Consequently on election day the Tamil constituencies returned nondescript members and not a united Tamil front such as the principal contenders had asked for. In the Northern Province, the Tamil Congress won four out of seven seats, the Federalists two with Chelvanayakam losing his seat, and the UNP one; three Tamil Independents secured election. In the Eastern Province the single Federalist candidate won in Trincomalee, while two others — sympathisers of the FP — also won, out of a total of seven seats. This result gave a strong indication of the Tamils' confused state of mind.

Despite the UNP's easy victory, the general election produced

40. In fact, two members joined Chelvanayakam: C. Vanniasingham and (Senator) E. M. V. Naganathan.

41. Confirmed in interview with Chelvanayakam, 20 May 1952.

results that were critical for the island's future. The ensuing phase, 1952-6, was one of political instability, and saw the burgeoning of movements such as Sinhala Only and Federalism, which started the disintegration of the island's stable polity. The Left was united only in calling for an extra-parliamentary effort to overthrow the government.

The issue of Sinhala as the only state language was now a subject of agitation, and Ponnambalam was obliged to declare that he would resign if Tamil were not also made a state language. He nevertheless expressed confidence in the Prime Minister's integrity.

Given this backdrop of political instability — serious divisions in the cabinet between the Prime Minister and his cousin Sir John Kotelawala (Leader of the House and a senior minister), the Sinhala language movement's gathering momentum and the fear that Tamil would be pushed aside, and the unsettled relations between India and Sri Lanka over the stateless Indians — the Federal Party devised a strategy in the new Parliament of maintaining equidistance between the principal Sinhala contenders.

There were many rumours that the party would not survive its stunning defeat at the polls, but there were two factors which were to keep it firmly on the rails. Chelvanayakam had clearly made a miscalculation, even to the extent of losing his seat to a rival whom he had easily defeated at the general election of 1947. But he was not going to revert to his legal practice as many expected. The *Ceylon Daily News* of 2 June 1952 condemned 'the Federalist leader and most of his supporters whose politics would logically lead to the subordination of Ceylon to South India'. The FP's Propaganda Secretary E. M. V. Naganathan, noting the left-wing criticism of the party as a 'bourgeois aberration', said that its MPs would not coalesce with any particular group but 'treat legislation on its merits'; the main work of the party would be to build up a network throughout the two Tamil provinces to ensure that they had grassroots support.

Chelvanayakam's Tamil supporters and the uncommitted looked on him as the guardian of their rights whether he was in Parliament or out of it, and his public statements received plenty of attention. On 24 August 1952, in a speech at Jaffna College, he said that when he first went to the south of Ceylon in 1915 as a student at St Thomas' College, the Sinhala people there lived as a 'race' (*sic*), whereas 'today they have become a nation. . . . We in North and East Ceylon should also develop into the most advanced stage of human society, that is, we should achieve national status.'

The next year, 1953, marked a turning-point for both the island and the Federal Party. Despite the prospects of stable government opened up by Dudley Senanayake's smooth accession and the overwhelming

vote of confidence which he obtained in the general election of April 1952, he proved unable to cope with family pressures. When the Marxist-led *hartal* (a complete stoppage of work tantamount to a general strike) took place on 12-13 August, he suffered a serious breakdown that continued till September 1953. He finally resigned on 3 October 1953. Sir John Kotelawala succeeded him as Prime Minister and retained the whole cabinet of his predecessor, though reshuffling the portfolios. However, within a week two senior ministers, including the Tamil Congress leader G. G. Ponnambalam, were removed.

This was also the phase when Chelvanayakam and his party became convinced that judges could be politically and communally pressured or motivated. The party thereafter refrained from seeking redress for wrongs through the judicial process. The citizenship case of Kodakan Pillai (appellant) versus Punchi Mudannayake (the Registering Officer and other respondents) was finally decided against Pillai by the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council on 11 May 1953, after much litigation.⁴²

Two other legal judgements in 1953 affected the future of the Federal Party. Chelvanayakam's election petition⁴³ against his successful opponent at the 1952 general election, S. Natesan, Minister of Posts and Information, came up for inquiry before Justice V. L. St Clair Swan, but this judge withdrew from the inquiry and was replaced by Justice K. D. de Silva. The latter, after his retirement from the Supreme Court, gave expression to blatant Sinhala ethnocentric sentiments, which makes the result of the inquiry seem in retrospect to have been a foregone conclusion. Chelvanayakam was required by the judge to pay what the former described to his immediate family as punitive and financially crippling costs to Natesan. The other was the decision in favour of G. G. Ponnambalam over the election petition filed against him by two FP supporters. The trial judge rebuked the deputy leader of the FP, C. Vanniasingham, who appeared as the petitioners' counsel, for his over-keen advocacy against Ponnambalam. Then at a meeting of the Federal Party in Kankasanturai on 25 July

42. Full text of judgement published in *CDN*, 19 May 1953.

43. Losing candidates who had reason to think that their defeat was due to malpractices by the winning candidate or his agents, e.g. bribery or impersonation, could file a petition before a judge of the Supreme Court challenging the validity of the election. If successful, a by-election would be held. An elected candidate found guilty of the malpractices alleged would be disqualified from standing again for seven years.

Chelvanayakam filed this case himself and eventually paid for it — a mark of his integrity, since it was usual for an unsuccessful candidate to get a pauper to file the case so that, if the challenge was unsuccessful, legal costs could not be recovered.

1953, a resolution was adopted demanding the establishment of a Tamil university — something which had not happened since the country became independent. This did not mean that the FP was conceding that the national University of Ceylon should become Sinhala; it merely reflected the growing fears of the Ceylon Tamils that Sinhala exclusivism would damage their prospects for higher education. Thus even before the Sinhala movement had advanced to the point of demanding that the Sinhala-oriented *Vidyalkankara* and *Vidyodaya pirivenas* (centres of Buddhist learning) be made universities, Ceylon Tamil opinion, as represented by the Federal Party, was seeking in advance to safeguard Tamil interests by asking for a Tamil university.

In 1954 it seemed as if the worst fears of Chelvanayakam and the Federal Party were beginning to materialise. This was when their principal opponent Ponnambalam, in a statement on his resignation in the House of Representatives on 2 November 1954, voiced the very fears of those from whom he had differed so bitterly since their parting in 1948.⁴⁴ In his statement Ponnambalam said that he was disillusioned with the implementation of the Indian and Pakistani citizenship legislation which he had supported in 1948. He now feared the growing aggressiveness of the Sinhala Only movement and the government's 'concerted attempt' to implement its colonisation policies 'to convert areas which have been predominantly if not exclusively Tamil-speaking, progressively, into Sinhalese-speaking areas'. He concluded: '. . . after five years of cooperation, I yet see unmistakable signs of a desire for the establishment of racial hegemony under the guise of majority rule. . . .', and added ruefully, 'I now find myself a more determined advocate of Tamil nationalism.' Ponnambalam's solution, however, was not the federalist option. Instead he urged the Tamil people to 'live in perfect amity . . . such cooperation and amity being based upon absolute equality and strength'. He expressed similar sentiments in other speeches at this time, in Trincomalee and Colombo. For the Federal Party, Ponnambalam's new stance vindicated all that they had stood for. The difference was that his grievances were focussed on the recently appointed Prime Minister, Kotelawala, who had removed him from his cabinet — his corollary being that there were more accommodating Sinhalese leaders who would heed Tamil expressions of disquiet. However, in Chelvanayakam's eyes Ponnambalam remained an implacable foe and an opportunist — not a convert but someone who would serve another Sinhalese prime minister to strengthen his own political power in the Tamil areas.

The Sinhala Only movement gathered strength. In particular, the

44. Parliamentary Debates (House of Representatives), 2 Nov. 1954.

government's decision to extend the medium of instruction in the mother-tongue (i.e. Sinhalese and Tamil to the exclusion of English) to senior forms in the secondary schools meant that increasingly the two communities would be isolated in watertight compartments with no common language to form a bridge between them. The growing agitation for Sinhala as the only state language received strong support from influential lay Buddhist leaders such as Professor G.P. Malalasekera and L.H. Mettananda, the principal of the premier Buddhist secondary school, Ananda College. To provide the movement with the ultimate fillip, a retired Chief Justice, Sir Arthur Wijeyewardene, added his support. In the commission he headed on the subject of the official languages (Sinhalese and Tamil), he advocated, in a rider to the final report, that Sinhala be made the only official language. Then in the Interim Report of another commission, that on higher education published on 23 August 1954, the same retired Chief Justice wrote another rider proposing that Sinhala be the only language of higher instruction in the island.

To add further fuel to this fire, two actions of Kotelawala, the Prime Minister, caused a conflagration. In January 1954 he concluded what came to be called the Nehru-Kotelawala Agreement. While satisfactory from the Indian side, it became entangled with the Sinhalese-Tamil issue and was subsequently abandoned due to the vehemence of Sinhala opposition. This centred around the number of resident Indians who, under the terms of the agreement, would be 'absorbed'. The figure was to be at least 300,000. Even more important, the Kotelawala government expected India to repatriate those Indians who did not qualify for Ceylon citizenship, but the Indian government insisted that only eligible Indians would be registered as Indian citizens, and those who failed to qualify for Indian or Ceylon citizenship would become 'stateless'. To clarify all doubts, the two governments concluded a second agreement in October 1954, but in the end neither of the two pacts resolved the question.

The second part of the agreement, which provided that Indians obtaining Ceylon citizenship should obtain a knowledge of the '*language of the area*', caused sharp controversy in Tamil circles. The Ceylon government, without saying so openly, was implying that the language in question was Sinhala, since the Indians were mainly resident in the Sinhala part of the country; however, influential Tamils, including a senior Ceylon Tamil minister in the Kotelawala cabinet, insisted that it could be 'either Sinhala or Tamil'. Equally controversial was the provision in the agreement for four Indian Tamil citizens of Ceylon to be elected as MPs by a *separate islandwide Indian and Pakistani electorate* of registered citizens. A bill providing for this passed its second reading in the Ceylon House of Representatives on 9 July.

From one point of view C. Suntharalingam, a former cabinet minister, condemned the bill as 'inhuman, uncharitable and a disgrace', adding 'If the Buddha were to come to this country today, he himself would be deported.' From the opposite angle, the FP's senior spokesman in the House criticised the 'unsatisfactory arrangements' for the registration of Indians as Ceylon citizens. Earlier, in a memorandum to the chairman of the Delimitation Commission, Chelvanayakam and E. M. V. Naganathan had urged that the number of seats in the House of Representatives be frozen since otherwise the principle of weightage in representation for the minorities would be adversely affected. They said they would send copies of their memorandum to the Indian and Ceylon Prime Ministers, as signatories to the January and October agreements, so that the two leaders would discuss the number of seats to be allotted to the registered citizens of the separate all-island electorate.

G. G. Ponnambalam, as leader of the All Ceylon Tamil Congress, discerned 'a desire of the present Prime Minister and his Cabinet for promoting the establishment of the supremacy of one race', evidence of which he asserted could not be better exemplified than in the negotiations on the Indo-Ceylon Pact. He particularly criticised the provision for a 'separate communal electorate' which, he insisted, would result in Indians being treated as second-class citizens. The most important group representing the Indian Tamils, the Ceylon Indian Congress, condemned the agreements from the beginning. Soon after the first one was signed in January 1953, it alleged that 'some of the terms of the agreement appear to deny fundamental rights . . . while the rest are so vague and nebulous as may be interpreted and applied to create greater disabilities than at present.'⁴⁵ It therefore sought further clarification of the proposals.

This chorus of Ceylon and Indian Tamil opposition to the two Nehru-Kotelawala pacts confirmed Chelvanayakam's original stance on the citizenship acts. The FP's position received additional confirmation from statements by the former Prime Minister Dudley Senanayake and S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike, soon to be Prime Minister. The former moved a resolution in the government parliamentary group that 'all further action by the Ceylon Government . . . be forthwith suspended' and expressed the view to the group that the agreement had 'not served any useful purpose' and 'should therefore be torn up'.⁴⁶

Bandaranaike's view was more revealing. In the *Ceylon Daily News*

45. Obtained from archival material at the office of the Ceylon Workers' Congress, then in Ananda Coomaraswamy Mawata, Colombo 3.

46. As reported in *CDN*, 16 Sept. 1954.

of 30 January 1954, he claimed that even at the 1940 talks in New Delhi⁴⁷ he had believed that the 'absorption' of about a million Indians would in the next twenty-five to fifty years cause '*very grave harm racially and politically to the Sinhalese* [italics ours] and economically to the Ceylonese as a whole'. He also made the interesting revelation that in the opinion of D. S. Senanayake, the leader of the Ceylon delegation to the 1940 talks, Indian Tamil labour was needed for the plantations but that 'restrictive legislation regarding the acquisition of the franchise by them would be sufficient to safeguard our interests'. Bandaranaike disclosed that Senanayake, when about to become the first Prime Minister of independent Ceylon, had contemplated that under his proposed citizenship legislation 'only a comparatively small number of Indians, *round about 50,000* [italics ours], would be registered as citizens'. Bandaranaike therefore criticised the arrangements for granting citizenship to an absorbable minimum of some 300,000 Indian Tamils envisaged by the Nehru-Kotelawala agreements of 1954. He was definite about the need to exclude the Indians from citizenship and the franchise, and was convinced from their conversation on the subject that D. S. Senanayake would not have agreed to the Indians having the position seemingly contemplated under the proposed agreement.

Bandaranaike's exposition of the problem revealed, first, that the Soulbury Commission had been led by D. S. Senanayake to believe that the Indians would receive a minimum of seven seats on the basis of the existing franchise; and secondly, that Senanayake's constitutional adviser, Sir Ivor Jennings, who had devised the scheme of representation, had insisted in his *The Constitution of Ceylon* (1953) — presumably on D. S. Senanayake's assurances — that had the Indian Tamils sought registration as citizens under the provisions of the 1948 and 1949 acts, many of them would have qualified and entered the electoral register. Even Ponnambalam, when he joined the Senanayake government, had no doubt that the Indians would have

47. Various called the 'Indo-Ceylon talks' and the 'Bajpai-Senanayake talks'. The Indian delegation was led by Sir Girjao Shankar Bajpai, Secretary-General of the Government of India's External Relations Department. The talks were held with the intention of finding a solution to the question of citizenship and franchise rights for the Indian plantation workers brought into Ceylon as indentured labourers by British planters in the 19th century. The relevance of Bandaranaike's revelation is that D. S. Senanayake planned for *only 50,000* to be given rights (the rest remaining a helotry). Sir Ivor Jennings and the Soulbury Commission were misled into believing that these 50,000 would be given at least 7, if not 12-15 seats under the Ministers' Draft Scheme, an absurdity. Jennings and G. G. Ponnambalam were also deceived into thinking that the citizenship legislation of 1948 and 1949 would easily enable the disfranchised Indians to re-establish their claims. Only Chelvanayakam seems to have understood Senanayake's premeditated deception.

qualified in large numbers if they had made use of the provisions of the act.

Chelvanayakam and his supporters did not say 'we told you so'; but on every public occasion and with statements in their political weekly the *Suthantiran* they called on the (Indian) Tamil-speaking people 'of the hill country' to unite with other Ceylon Tamils under an all-island Tamil Front. In August 1954, at a public meeting in Mallakam (Jaffna), Chelvanayakam reiterated his demand for a federal form of government as the only form that would give the Tamils their due rights. Returning to this same theme in October of that year, in an address to the Young Men's Muslim Association, Fort (Colombo), he alluded to the attempts of the Kotelawala government and others of the Sinhala leadership to absorb the Indian Tamils.⁴⁸ Federalism, he said, was the best solution to the country's linguistic problems, adding: 'The action of the government to force the Tamil-speaking people to become Sinhalese-speaking [a reference to the 'language of the area' clause in the Nehru-Kotelawala Pact] is wrong and immoral; the right of a people to live according to their religion and culture is a legitimate right.' A linguistic group would be at the mercy of the majority: 'It is better to have our own territory, our culture and self-respect than be a minority in the island living on the good fortune of the majority community.'

As for the Tamil-speaking Muslims, though they would continue to be a minority in a federated state, they would form a bigger percentage in whichever state they chose to live. He warned them of state-sponsored Sinhala colonisation of the predominantly Muslim area of Gal-Oya in the Eastern Province; this would deny them a 'majority area' and make it impossible for them to elect their own representative to the central legislature.

The election petition of S. J. V. Chelvanayakam was heard in 1954. With hindsight it is clear that the case should never have been filed; Chelvanayakam lost it and the judge awarded the respondent what to Chelvanayakam were crippling costs — Rs 40,000. The hearings took an inordinately long time, from 21 April to 25 June. Some of what transpired in the proceedings, for the historical record, highlights interesting aspects of Chelvanayakam's career. He stated under oath that being a Christian while the majority of his electors were Hindus had never handicapped him in his political career. In the 1947 general election, he had not refused to come forward, 'but by nature he did not want to put himself forward'. He was a constitutionalist who did not seek to rock the boat; in the 1947 election, 'the objective of his

48. Full text of speech in *CDN*, 27 Oct. 1954.

party was to show the people that they were against the Constitution and to amend the Constitution, never to wreck the Constitution.’⁴⁹

In his evidence Chelvanayakam elaborated his position that he was an idealist who did not wish to play the role of pragmatist. There was no conflict, he said, between his ideals and the material benefits to the members of his constituency; if there was, he would ‘choose his ideals’. He was a relative newcomer to politics, his interest having begun in 1937 or 1939. An attempt had been made once to persuade him to accept a cabinet portfolio, but he had declined because ‘office was not his ambition’. The suggestion had come from his good friend H. V. Perera, one of the government’s chief legal advisers, and had thus clearly been a serious one. What he was interested in was a properly constructed, principled coalition between the UNP and ACTC (of which he was then a member). A proposal by the UNP to take the Tamil Congress into a coalition was reported to be in the offing, without any suggestion of compromises on its positions with the government, and the MPs of the Tamil Congress had decided by a majority vote that he, Chelvanayakam, should accept the one portfolio that was being offered. However, he declined because the mere act of participation meant for him unsatisfactory compromises on the various matters in dispute.

On the other hand G. G. Ponnambalam and D. S. Senanayake believed that in the close relationship with the UNP resulting from the Tamil Congress’s involvement in the coalition, the junior partner would have to make vital concessions. In his evidence on 11 February, Chelvanayakam made clear what he understood by coalition government: it was a situation where the two or more parties concerned ‘do not put forward any proposal or condition that hinders any particular party in the coalition’. He opposed Ponnambalam accepting a portfolio because the leaders of the Tamil Congress Group were ‘succumbing to the leaders of the UNP and surrendering the ideals of the [TC] party’. He claimed that the FP appealed to ‘the younger and middle-aged people who are attracted by something progressive in politics like the federal policy’. Thus he was totally opposed to the citizenship legislation of 1948 and 1949, which went against the principles the Tamil Congress stood for. He thus voted against it in Parliament and resigned from the Congress.

In his evidence he laid to rest the allegations of various Sinhalese parties that he supported the idea of a separate sovereign state. On 8

49. The full court proceedings provide the details; these are available in the court records. They are also reported in part in the *CDN* of the period 22 April to 28 June (1954).

February, he asserted that the Tamil words that labelled his party as 'Thamil Arasu' stood for 'Tamil state' and not 'Tamil kingdom'. The objective of his party was 'to achieve an autonomous Tamil state within the framework of a federal Ceylon'.

The Federalists lost their second court battle over the election petition filed against G. G. Ponnambalam, on 6 September 1954. The case began on 26 October 1954 and ended, having lasted 128 days, on 8 July 1954. In his judgment Justice Weerasooria observed that he did not think it 'an entirely unwarranted conclusion that the Federal Party is vitally interested in the successful outcome of this case'.

Still another significant event in the year was the decision to replace the Governor-General and principal architect of the constitution, Lord Soulbury, with Sir Oliver Goonetilleke. There had been bad blood between Lord Soulbury and the Prime Minister, Kotelawala, caused by Soulbury passing over the claims of Kotelawala in March 1952 in favour of Dudley Senanayake.

This was the time when the cup of Sinhalese chauvinism began to run over, and the main Sinhala parties in their anxiety for power rushed to drink from it. Bandaranaike was not of their number, contrary to the view of the political classes that he was clutching at every straw to become Prime Minister. In the *Trine* case,⁵⁰ responding to questioning by the British QC, D. N. Pritt, for the news-sheet of that name, Bandaranaike answered the Chief Justice: 'Yes, my Lord. We have to go through this botheration because the majority speak the Sinhalese language.'⁵¹ On the same occasion he admitted to not being able 'to read Sinhalese fast'. It was thus ironic that it was he who was shortly to unleash the forces of Sinhala nationalism.

The months that followed saw the unfolding of the tragedy of Sinhala Only. The Prime Minister Kotelawala, in his usual unthinking way of speaking, made an important policy announcement while on a tour of Jaffna in September 1954, to the effect that he would amend the constitution to provide for Sinhala and Tamil to have parity of status. The FP was not willing to accept such an assurance. As early as January that year the party's vice-president, C. Vanniasingham, MP, had said that he was suspicious of the promise to put Sinhalese and Tamil on 'an equal footing throughout Ceylon'. How could this be, he asked, when there was opposition to the Indian Tamil population being granted citizenship just because they were Tamil-speaking? E. M. V. Naganathan at the same time spoke even more

50. The news-weekly *Trine* was operated by a prominent Communist Party (Moscow) sympathiser, Mrs Theja Gunawardena. The Crown prosecutors charged her with criminal libel for publishing defamatory statements about the Prime Minister, Sir John Kotelawala, and his government.

51. For these remarks and other proceedings, see *CDN*, 20 and 21 Jan. 1954.

plainly: 'The moment they switched on to *swabasha* [one's own language] and had two languages, the next logical step would be a Tamil state for the predominantly Tamil-speaking areas and a Sinhalese state for the predominantly Sinhalese ones.'

Ponnambalam marked himself off from the Federalists. He refused to believe that their constitutional changes would preserve the identity of the Tamils in the two Tamil provinces, and was more in agreement with the earlier position of the mainstream Sinhala political parties, favouring the two languages being designated as official languages. The details — what all this would mean in practice — still had to be worked out. Ponnambalam introduced the concept of 'parity of status' for the two languages, but this needed careful definition. In a speech at Trincomalee on 27 October 1954, he said that 'Tamil and Sinhalese should be given equal status and . . . be the official languages throughout the island'. He added that a constitutional amendment to this effect would not suffice 'unless . . . implemented in the day-to-day administration of the country'.⁵²

S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike was the only senior politician of the time to see the Sinhala movement as an opportunity. Its widespread support and popular appeal offered him his best chance of defeating the UNP government at a general election. The leadership of the movement had been offered to the former Prime Minister, Dudley Senanayake, and at that time he was emphatic on the need for parity of status for the two languages. Bandaranaike said in Parliament that the Prime Minister's ill-timed and ill-advised offer on his visit to Jaffna had unleashed the forces of Sinhala Only. The Prime Minister protested that he had been misinterpreted, but the result was that the movement successfully coerced the mainstream parties and their leaders to switch to Sinhala Only, whereas only a few months earlier the two-language formula had been accepted as a settled fact.

The year 1954 proved to be destabilising for Ceylon's polity. Despite some recognition in the area of external relations, and the convening of the Colombo Powers' conference of April 1954 at the Prime Minister's initiative to lay the groundwork for the Bandung summit conference of Non-aligned states the following year, there was disunity in the government. A turning-point came in 1955, after which Ceylon began its descent into anarchy. Indigenous social forces in the Sinhala community chose this time to coerce their leadership in the UNP and SLFP to abandon their national stance on language and to seek electoral victory by pandering to the demand for Sinhala to be made the only state language. The left wing, comprising the Trotskyist LSSP and the pro-Moscow CP, stood their ground on parity of

52. Details in *CDN*, 27 Oct. 1954.

status for the two languages, but even there a splinter group — the VLSSP,⁵³ led by the acknowledged ‘father of Marxism’ Philip Gunawardene — joined Bandaranaike in forming a pro-Sinhala coalition, the People’s United Front (MEP — *Mahajana Eksath Peramuna*). Throughout the year the Prime Minister, Kotelawala, was embarrassed by the increasing difficulty he found in delivering on his promise to provide equality for the two languages. By the end of 1955 he and his party were engulfed by the Sinhala Only movement, and in February 1956 the UNP at its annual conference adopted a resolution to make Sinhala the only state language.

The Ceylon Tamil MPs of the UNP were devastated. Earlier in 1953 they had assured the Tamil people that the UNP would stand by its policy, but towards the end of the year they were proposing bills of rights to protect the minority communities, and when the UNP refused to consider them, they switched to a demand for a separate state. The Tamil electors were not impressed. Ponnambalam, now almost a one-man Tamil Congress party in Parliament, proposed at various times parity of status and the continued use of English. He too lost his standing. How and why these dramatic changes all occurred in the course of one critical year is explained below. In the reports of two commissions on the question, first on official languages and then on higher education, Sir Arthur Wijeyewardena articulated the Sinhala position that Sinhala alone be recognised as the language of the state and of higher education. This change would reflect the wish of the Sinhala-educated rural classes to establish their primacy in society and obtain a lead over the Ceylon Tamils in public and private sector employment and, later, in admissions to the university and the professions.

The Ceylon Tamil reaction to the Sinhala Only movement was one of despair and desperation. Chelvanayakam had already said on 1 January 1956: ‘Almost every Tamil has now accepted that the position of the Tamil people in Ceylon is precarious.’ No one, he said, could argue that the Tamil language was safe in Ceylon when the government was seeking to force a million Indian Tamils to emigrate. Then on 3 April came the annual conference of the Federal Party at which its new president and putative heir to Chelvanayakam, C. Vanniasingham, reiterated the demand for a federal union, which he claimed was ‘the least that the Tamil-speaking people can demand’. It would ‘be fair by the Sinhalese, as the Tamils did not want to dominate them even as they, the Tamils, did not want to be dominated by them; . . . federalism would enable them to live as equal partners of a new union.’ Vanniasingham was not specific about the structure of the envisaged

53. VLSSP stands for *Viplavakari Lanka Sama Samaja Party*, which in English translation means ‘Revolutionary Ceylon Equal Society Party’.

federation except that it would have a minimalist centre where the federal union would look after a number of agreed common subjects. The new president of the party referred to the successful agitation in Andhra Pradesh for a separate linguistic state within the Indian federation; this should be an example for all Tamil groups forming a united front to insist on their objective.⁵⁴

Vanniasingham dismissed Ponnambalam's plea for the retention of English: 'There are those who think that English should be the official language of the country. It is not at all desirable to have a foreign language as the official language. Only the languages of the country, namely Tamil and Sinhalese, can become official languages.' In private Federal Party MPs welcomed the recognition of the Tamil language by the state — the sooner the better, since any postponement, as would occur with the imposition of English as an interim solution, would 'make Sinhalese of us all'. There was already provision in Tamil-medium schools in the Jaffna peninsula for Tamil students to be taught Sinhala as a second language, and in time Tamils aspiring to public and private sector employment in the Sinhala areas would become competent in the ethnic majority's language. Vanniasingham voiced the fears of many Tamils when he said: 'Unless Sinhalese also take to the study of Tamil, it would be unwise for Tamils to encourage their children to study Sinhalese.' He also argued for two separate universities, Tamil and Sinhalese, as a logical step resulting from instruction in the mother-tongue and the recognition of Sinhala and Tamil as official languages.

At this same conference, Chelvanayakam, who was becoming increasingly ill with Parkinson's disease, expressed his desire to retire from politics, although he would continue to serve the Tamil cause. He criticised the personality cult among the Tamil electors: 'Neither the Ponnambalam party [the TC] nor the Vaithianathan party [the UNP]' would help the Tamils. 'Only a party with good ideals like the Federal Party . . . would help the Tamils.' A question in the minds of many Tamils was how a federal system could be obtained from a hostile Sinhala majority. Chelvanayakam remarked that Gandhi was laughed at when he took on the mighty British empire; thus the Tamils needed to be united in order to win their objective. By the end of the year the Federalists were confident of victory at the polls.

Ponnambalam pursued an experimental path. It is likely that he was influenced by the British Vice-Chancellor of the University of Ceylon, Sir Ivor Jennings,⁵⁵ who had told him that the Tamils would gain by

54. Interviews with Chelvanayakam and Vanniasingham, 19 April 1955.

55. The *Jennings Archives* reveal that Jennings endeavoured to persuade Ponnambalam to fight for the retention of English as this course of action would be more helpful to the Tamils in their efforts to retain their existing positions in the public services.

insisting on English as the official language. The Tamils in general were more proficient in English than the Sinhalese except for the élite class of the latter. Ponnambalam had many Tamil supporters but the winds of change were blowing against the retention of English. He was bitter against the Federalists' stance on language; at a press interview on 2 June 1955 he expressed the fear that Sinhala would ultimately be imposed as the only state language, adding: 'One decade of the imposition of the Sinhalese language on the Tamil race [*sic*] will convert the Tamils in everything but name into Sinhalese.' He objected to there being two languages of instruction in one university; his view, for which he pleaded, was that while the students should have every opportunity to attain 'a higher standard of excellence in the mother-tongue', 'all other subjects should be taught through a universal language', namely English. The mother-tongue policy of the government, he argued, was 'opening up schisms in the structure of the country'. In a speech at Point Pedro reported in the press on 30 July 1955, Ponnambalam insisted that the two streams in education, Sinhala and Tamil, would result in the 'elimination of free competition' and end in 'a preponderant quota of places for Sinhalese in Sinhalese areas'. He thought, like his rivals in the Federal Party, that the Sinhalese and Tamils had 'arrived at the parting of the ways'.

Yet a little later, at a speech in Jaffna, Ponnambalam went back on all this, probably under pressure from the strong Tamil language lobby advocating the use of the mother-tongue in education. He now proposed bilingualism so that a 'cooperative spirit' between the Sinhalese and Tamils could be promoted — this was in contradiction to his earlier warnings of the danger of separate states emerging and the Tamils being overwhelmed.

As the year progressed, the Tamils appeared to realise their perilous situation. On 24 June, the Independent Tamil MP for Vavuniya and former cabinet minister, C. Suntharalingam, moved an amendment to the Speech from the Throne expressing grave dissatisfaction with the government's policy on the use of the national languages for state purposes and as media of instruction for higher education, which had reached the point of a demand for 'the formation of a separate independent state of *Thamil Ilankai*, comprising Tamil-speaking peoples in Ceylon, within the Commonwealth'. He himself, like the UNP Tamils, was following an 'either/or' policy: if the impending language changes did not satisfy the Tamils, they would demand a separate state.

In November several statements were made by UNP Tamil politicians indicating a new polarisation of opinion. The cabinet minister S. Natesan, almost the only UNP Tamil politician of standing, said at a public function that if the motion on parity of status for the two

languages were defeated at the UNP meeting soon to be held, he would resign his portfolio. V. Kumaraswamy, a junior minister, said that if at the forthcoming UNP sessions, scheduled for February 1956, it were decided to have Sinhala as the only state language, he would move that a UN boundary commission be appointed with Lord Soulbury as chairman 'in the interests of peace and goodwill'. Tamil-speaking UNP MPs resolved, on similar lines, to move at the UNP sessions that the constitution be revised to create two separate sovereign states or a federal system with two autonomous states. Chelvanayakam had already said a few weeks earlier that 'the only way for the Tamils to live without loss of their rights and self-respect' was to establish a Tamil state within a federal system.

In late December, when the question of a statement of fundamental rights was being widely canvassed by UNP Tamil politicians, Chelvanayakam asserted that despite sections 29 and 30 of the constitution, half the Tamil-speaking voters of the country were disfranchised. He went on to refer to the fourteenth amendment to the US constitution, which showed 'the utter futility of fundamental rights as a constitutional safeguard for national minorities which enjoy no political sanction'. He concluded: 'No amount of writing fundamental rights into the constitution of a unitary state in a multi-national country is going to safeguard minority groups from the oppression of the majority.' Indeed such a constitution tended to become, in reality, 'an engine of oppression'.

Meanwhile the Sinhala Only movement was advancing rapidly. The All-Ceylon Buddhist Congress had appointed in April 1954 an unofficial Buddhist Committee of Inquiry, having failed in 1951 to persuade the D.S. Senanayake government to constitute an official commission. In the succeeding months and throughout 1955, the Committee toured the country and on 4 February 1956 presented its report, which was printed in a 124-page English translation, *The Betrayal of Buddhism*, and a Sinhala version with 189 pages. The effect on the Kotelawala government was devastating. As well as containing a fierce condemnation of the proselytising activities of Christian missionary organisations, the report gave a major boost to the Sinhala movement.

Dr N. M. Perera and his far-left party, the LSSP, virtually entrapped the Prime Minister with a resolution in Parliament on 19 October 1955 proposing an amendment to the constitution to provide for 'Sinhalese and Tamil to be the state languages of Ceylon'. In the mover's view, 'vacillation' by the government over implementing J. R. Jayewardene's original State Council motion of 1944 was the cause of 'all the trouble today'. The only way to bring harmony to the country was for the House to adopt his motion. Bandaranaike then

moved an amendment which nullified the good intentions of Dr Perera's motion. It was that the constitution should provide forthwith 'for Sinhalese to be the state language of Ceylon'. The Government Parliamentary Group met on 18 October and, characterising Dr Perera's motion as an 'election stunt', decided that the Prime Minister should make a statement that it was government policy to recognise both Sinhala and Tamil 'and it was therefore not necessary to amend the constitution'. The Opposition countered by accusing the government of sitting on the fence.

The Senanayake cousins, Dudley and R. G., played a dubious role in the language confrontation — whatever their motives, the result was to undermine Kotelawala's position in the UNP. Dudley Senanayake declared his opposition to the demand of the Tamils for parity of status for the two languages, and in December further underscored his opposition to parity on the ground that if the different communities — Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslim — were to live peacefully, 'there must be one language and that one, Sinhalese, to link them together'. R. G. Senanayake echoed those views on 19 December when he said that Ceylon could be made 'one happy nation' if Sinhalese were made the only state language. Up till the end of 1953, S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike had been an advocate of the two languages being officially recognised. He accused the ruling UNP of depriving the common people of access to governmental information and participation in the political process because of the continuance of English and the slowness and reluctance of the anglicised élite to switch to the national languages — which, at the general election of 1952, he promised to do within a short time. He was not an advocate of Sinhala Only like the Senanayakes, who thought of a unilingual Sinhala state as the means of protecting the Sinhala language, religion and civilisation. But he was very much a practical politician, and realised the vote-catching potential of Sinhala Only as a policy, which opened up the possibility of defeating the seemingly invincible UNP.

By December 1955, most Sinhalese political parties were anxious to assume for themselves the role of proponents of Sinhala Only. The movement had gathered momentum and was in search of a mass leader. As has already been mentioned, Dudley Senanayake declined that role. The movement distrusted the UNP as such even though the party was known to be preparing for a *volte face* at its annual sessions scheduled for 17–18 February 1956. At the SLFP's annual sessions in mid-December 1955, Bandaranaike had claimed that the UNP, when it assembled for its own session in February 1956, might well adopt the same line as his party — that Sinhalese should be the sole official language. However, it would say that the time was not yet opportune and that it would take 'five, ten or twenty years to make the change-

over from English'.⁵⁶ So it would inform its Tamil supporters that they could leave the UNP government temporarily and rejoin after the general election. The UNP however did not follow such a course; instead, at its February 1956 sessions, it adopted a one-line resolution that 'Sinhalese alone should be made the state language of Ceylon' and declined to consider the proposal for a bill of rights put forward by its Tamil supporters. However, in the previous month all Tamil UNP MPs resigned from the party.

Bandaranaike and the SLFP resolved at their December 1955 sessions to make Sinhala the only official language with provision for recognition of the 'reasonable use' of Tamil. The Tamil aspect of this resolution was downplayed during the election campaign, but exploited extensively in 1958 (the Tamil Language Special Provisions Act) by Bandaranaike himself and in 1966 (the Tamil Regulations) by Dudley Senanayake when his government presented its legislative proposals to Parliament. Bandaranaike had been campaigning throughout 1955 on the dangers to the Sinhala race (*sic*) of granting the Tamil language parity of status. The climax came on 13 November, a month before the SLFP's annual sessions, when he declared at a public meeting: 'If parity is granted, it will mean disaster to the Sinhalese race.' Expanding on this, he explained that the Tamils, 'with their language and culture and the will and strength characteristic to their race, . . . would come to exert their dominant power over us.'⁵⁷ It was clear that he was playing on the fears of the Sinhala people and especially on the Sinhala intelligentsia's traditional dislike of the achievement-oriented competitiveness of the Ceylon Tamils.

The first quarter of 1956 saw Ceylon in a state of social and political ferment. The Sinhala Only movement, led by Bandaranaike, was drawing support from a wide coalition of the rural élites, the rural underclass and militant segments of Sinhala Buddhist opinion among both the laity and the clergy, represented respectively by the *Bhasa Peramuna* (the Sinhala Language Front) and the *Eksath Bhikku Peramuna* (the United Front of Buddhist Monks). Philip Gunawardene's Marxist-oriented VLSSP had committed itself as early as March 1955 to Sinhala Only, with provision for Tamil as 'the regional language in the Northern and Eastern Provinces'. A few days after the UNP's switch (on 18 February 1956) to Sinhala Only, the SLFP joined with other pro-Sinhala groupings to form the MEP, the People's United Front. The LSSP and CP continued to support the idea of parity. Despite the contradiction, Bandaranaike entered into a no-contest electoral agreement with these parity parties.

56. Text of speech in *CDN*, 19 Dec. 1955.

57. *CDN*, 14 Nov. 1955.

The stage was thus set for the Federal Party to reap the harvest of bitterness, anger and frustration of the Tamils against their betrayal by the mainstream Sinhala parties. There was some hope that the Marxist parties could be a moderating force in the event of a hung Parliament. However, Sinhala feeling had reached fever pitch and any modification of policy would have been all but impossible.

The UNP Tamil parliamentarians sought to salvage their ruined credibility. They talked of united fronts, a council of elders, a National Assembly of Tamils and, most important, an agreed programme which would adopt the Federal Party's credo on language, state-aided colonisation, a traditional homeland and federal autonomy. Unity meetings of rival Tamil political groupings were held on 22 January and 1, 4 and 23 February, but produced no results. The main objective of this activity was to enable the UNP Tamil parliamentarians to return to Parliament in an agreed electoral list, but the Federal Party would hear none of it. Thus the plans of the UNP Tamils had gone awry, and the Tamil community seemed to have hit rock-bottom.

Chelvanayakam, with his authority enhanced, asserted that once the united body of Tamil opinion had identified with the policies of the Federal Party, there was no question that anyone should represent the Tamils other than those who had not already toiled hard for the cause. He pronounced that once unanimity on political objectives had been realised, the Tamil people should be free to choose their parliamentary representatives. The Federal Party won a sweeping victory in the general election of April 1956. Chelvanayakam was hailed as the prophet. In the words of W. Howard Wriggins, he

had long been the most outspoken and consistent Tamil political leader to warn of Sinhalese domination and he had refused all offers of office made by the UNP in the past. Ever since the first independence Parliament he had maintained that the present unitary constitution was inappropriate to a country of mixed population, that only a federal constitution could protect the rights of the Tamil-speaking minority. When the Tamils began to feel seriously threatened by the Sinhalese language reform that would clearly be to their disadvantage, they naturally turned to a man of known integrity.⁵⁸

His testing time had now come. In tracing the launching of Chelvanayakam's movement, we shall have to go back in time briefly for the purpose of maintaining continuity.

58. W. Howard Wriggins. *op. cit.*, p. 334.

LAUNCHING A POLITICAL MOVEMENT

Ponnambalam's exit caused a crisis of confidence in the ranks of nationalist-minded Ceylon Tamils who had trusted in his charismatic leadership and political skills in mesmerising the Ceylon Tamil electorate of the Jaffna peninsula. In many ways the lost leader, who had dominated the stage since 1934, was irreplaceable. He had fought valiantly for the cause — but he had chosen to compromise it by pursuing the path of reconciliation without settling the outstanding issues in advance.

In the group led by Chelvanayakam there was the nucleus of a new party, but this was a minority group which had the uphill task of starting anew from all that had been constructed especially in the phase from 1938 when the All Ceylon Tamil Congress (ACTC) had its vague beginnings. Chelvanayakam had certainly been the mainstay of the Congress and Ponnambalam's chief lieutenant. The belief of all Congressites including himself was that their leader would uphold the cause until their principal demands had been satisfied.

What does a political grouping do when its leader apparently nullifies its rationale by crossing the floor — and takes with him more than half its representatives in Parliament? How can the confidence and the expectations of the many who feel themselves let down be restored? How, above all, is the leadership vacuum to be filled? The dissidents in the Tamil Congress had several options. The easiest would have been to scatter to the four winds, but with a man like Chelvanayakam in charge this was clearly not an option. The alternative therefore was either to seek an opportunity to displace Ponnambalam from the leadership or organise a new political formation. For a few months Chelvanayakam considered which of these courses would best suit the circumstances.

His two principal parliamentary supporters, Senator E. M. V. Naganathan and C. Vanniasingham, came into the open and roundly condemned Ponnambalam for his betrayal of the cause. Ponnambalam now discerned who his principal enemy was, and he chided Chelvanayakam in public speeches and in letters to the *Ceylon Daily News*, challenging him to come forward. Chelvanayakam was not going to make a snap decision, but it was known that Naganathan and Vanniasingham had acted with his consent and that it was only a matter of time before he too would enter the debate. No doubt he realised how daunting was the task that lay ahead of him.

Expressing dissent in public was easy enough, but for Chelva-

nayakam the Tamil interest was not a matter of politics only. This was a cause, and as guardians and trustees of that cause he and his colleagues, bitter as they might be in their condemnation of the lost leader, whose departure had left such a void, were obliged to honour the confidence of those Tamils who had relied on the ACTC. The argument which they presented to the public, and which reflected their own feelings, was as follows. They had placed their whole faith in Ponnambalam and acknowledged him as undisputed leader. The Tamil people had done the same, and his decision had seemed like a mortal blow. But just because the Tamil movement had become identified with the person of Ponnambalam, they said that in future they would organise a movement based on the principles of the cause, and that they would not allow the charisma of a leader to determine the destiny of the Tamil people.

It was on this basis that ITAK, the splinter faction of the ACTC, was launched in December 1949. In the English rendering of its name, it became the Federal Freedom Party for the Tamil-speaking Peoples of Ceylon (FP). The Ceylon Tamils have a generally middle-class orientation and prefer, if given the choice, to find security and espouse a set of principles with predictable results rather than venture into the unknown. They would need to be convinced that Ponnambalam had chosen the wrong path, that the Sinhala political élites were unwilling to share power with them, and that the only recourse they had left was to function on the principle of self-development of their traditional territories. The latter, when translated into an understandable concept, was a federal system in which the Tamil unit or units would have adequate autonomy. A massive effort was needed to introduce the idea of federalism into the vocabulary of a community which till only a short time before had been familiar only with the various theories of communal representation that had been advanced since the beginning of the twentieth century.

Since the middle of the nineteenth century the educated segments of the Ceylon Tamil community have constituted a middle-class ascendancy. Their enterprise and the barrenness of their traditional heartland in the Northern and Eastern Provinces made them send their children to the secondary schools of proselytising Christian missions in these areas. Consequently Ceylon Tamils took to government service in larger numbers than their Sinhala counterparts, both in the island and in that favoured emigré territory, Malaya (then the Federated Malay States). Many of them also entered the traditional professions.

The community thus possesses a higher than normal level of political consciousness, and a sharp awareness of its minority status in society.

They tend to be individualistic and to think independently. For as long as they lived under a neutral and impartial arbiter such as the British, the Ceylon Tamils felt secure. However, from the turn of the century, when a Ceylon Reform Movement began to make headway, they felt acutely threatened by the Sinhala majority. They understood that if the constitutional progress desired by this Movement made headway, they would be the losers. A result would be that merit as a criterion would be replaced by political patronage and manipulation of the system.

The Ceylon Tamils prided themselves that it was merit and efficiency that had raised them to the various life situations they enjoyed, and they therefore rallied behind leaders such as the Ponnambalam brothers (Ramanathan and Arunachalam) and G. G. Ponnambalam in the hope that they would safeguard their vital interests in any constitutional scheme of reforms. All three leaders followed the well-trodden path of communal representation. Chelvanayakam now proposed a radically different solution. Several years were to pass before the Ceylon Tamils accepted this as their only way forward.

Against these entrenched thought processes, Chelvanayakam had to make his plea to the Ceylon Tamils for an autonomous Tamil unit or units to be federated to the Sinhala parts of the country, and in this he faced the opposition of four groups, all of whom were implacable. The Colombo Tamils, with whom we can include the Ceylon Tamils in the seven Sinhala provinces, feared for their future. Their understanding of federalism was that it implied an institutionalised apartheid, and several years were to pass before they realised that under a federal set up they would be free to live anywhere, as became clear after S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike and Chelvanayakam signed their Pact of July 1957. Ponnambalam and his ACTC denounced federalism as 'bad for Ceylon and worse for the Tamils', and at the general election of 1952 some of his ACTC followers warned that under federalism no trains would run beyond Elephant Pass (the isthmus connecting the Jaffna peninsula to the rest of the island).

Aside from his personal rivalries with Chelvanayakam, Ponnambalam regarded a federal system as disadvantageous to the Ceylon Tamils. They would not have equal rights in the seven Sinhala provinces and would consequently lose out in employment and commerce. In this he was supported not only by his ACTC but by sections of Jaffna Tamil opinion which were conditioned to believe that the Ceylon Tamils would be better off in an all-island polity, an attitude somewhat similar to Ponnambalam's thinking but more conservative.

The political organisations of the Indian Tamil plantation workers looked askance at a federal plan because the demarcation of the Ceylon Tamil areas would not benefit them but rather weaken their position:

the two communities would become compartmentalised, with the Indian Tamils having no connection or 'Jinnah corridor' to the Northern and Eastern Provinces. Hence their opposition, despite their appreciation of Chelvanayakam's uncompromising position on their rights. The churches, Catholic and Protestant, stood in opposition. A federal set-up, as they understood it, would cause a split between Sinhala and Tamil Christians, thus reducing the strength they possessed as a single entity in a unitary state.

Most intransigent of all were the Sinhala political class, including the Sinhala-centred bureaucracy in Colombo. Even the lesser version of federalism, regional autonomy within a unitary state, was anathema to them, and it was an issue on which the two main Sinhala political parties waged political war, each accusing the other of selling out to the Ceylon Tamils. The Sinhala bureaucrats, in addition to being communal, were, as if by a reflex action, unwilling to decentralise power. Their position has largely remained the same up to the time of writing despite the civil war which has raged since 1983.

Chelvanayakam and his colleagues Naganathan and Vanniasingham confronted these problems at the moment of launching their movement. However, they were assured of the support of the lower-level Ceylon Tamil government workers and the peasantry of the Jaffna peninsula, who had no contact with the Sinhalas. This was an adequate political base. Chelvanayakam's reputation as a lawyer of integrity and a personality in Colombo and Vanniasingham's stature among the orthodox Hindus of Jaffna helped considerably, and Naganathan was also a well-known figure in Colombo. He had great organisational skills, and his ability to write persuasive pamphlets explaining federalism and the party's stand helped to develop a political base among the well-educated people in the Northern and Eastern Provinces.

Chelvanayakam's capacity as a leader was in question in this early phase. The emergence of the FP no doubt crystallised an indefinable feeling among sections of the Ceylon Tamil middle class at the time that Ponnambalam was not to be trusted and that his fifty-fifty solution would not even work in a modified form. Ponnambalam claimed that he had honoured the mandate of responsive cooperation he had obtained, that the ACTC parliamentary group had supported the decision to join the Senanayake government by a majority vote, and that it was Chelvanayakam and his colleagues who had flouted the majority. He contended that Chelvanayakam and his parliamentary supporters should resign and seek the electorate's confirmation of their present stance in a new contest.

However, although a vague and general feeling prevailed that Ponnambalam had cut his links with the Ceylon Tamils' political cause,

there was questioning as to who was the appropriate leader to take his place. For a few years after 1949, many Ceylon Tamils doubted the leadership capacity of Chelvanayakam, given his gentle ways and dignified manner of debate. Ponnambalam possessed great oratorical skills, knew how to win over the masses, and was the embodiment of political aggression. In short, it was thought that Chelvanayakam, who was better at displaying understanding and feeling than hostility, was no match for Ponnambalam. Although Chelvanayakam himself was well aware that this was how he was viewed, he nevertheless did not seek to change his image. He remained fixed to his Gandhian approach, in contrast to Ponnambalam's urge to coerce.

More insidious in its effect on the FP position was another school of thought, then in the process of formulation, which was influential in Ceylon Tamil opinion. This school advanced the view that both Ponnambalam and Chelvanayakam should continue in Parliament, and that Ponnambalam could then use Chelvanayakam as a lever to wring the maximum concessions out of the government with the argument that if these were not conceded, the FP would gain the upper hand. There is evidence that for a time this strategy succeeded.

Chelvanayakam, Naganathan and Vanniasingham and their immediate supporters proceeded with their plans to launch the movement. Chelvanayakam had advanced the idea of federalism as early as 1946-7, but had not definitely articulated it at the time with a view to winning the ACTC's approval; probably he intended to use it as a fallback position. When he broke ranks with Ponnambalam, he was not certain with which state the Northern and Eastern Provinces should federate. He had advocated a link-up with India, but speakers from Madras who came to Colombo had cold-shouldered the idea. Thus A. Ratnayake, a member of the Senanayake Cabinet, said at the second reading debate of the Indian and Pakistani Citizenship Bill in August 1948:

'The honourable Member for Kankasanturai [Chelvanayakam] is a dreamer of dreams. He, in his dreams, sees certain visions of Ceylon according to his heart's desire. He, for instance, would like to see Ceylon divided into two parts; one part consisting of the Sinhalese-speaking population, and the other of the Tamil-speaking population, and he would like to federate the Northern and Eastern parts of Ceylon with India.'¹

Chelvanayakam had been testing the waters, and finally concluded that the federal union would have to be with the Sinhala provinces. Ponnambalam countered with the view that there could only be a federation if the Sinhala section were agreeable, and that there was no

1. *Parliamentary Debates* (House of Representatives), vol. 1, col. 1167.

example in the world of a two-unit federation, to which the FP responded that West Pakistan and East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) were the only two parts of the federation of Pakistan at the time of its formation. The general opinion at this phase was that Chelvanayakam was a visionary and was advancing impractical views which the pragmatic 'Jaffna man' would not accept.

Chelvanayakam brought a modern mind to bear on the federal idea which, as already mentioned, was successfully germinated among sections of Ceylon Tamils, especially lower-rung government servants in Colombo and the farmers of Jaffna. He did not dwell overmuch on their 'glorious past' — their historic victories in wars with the Sinhalese kings — or try to draw inspiration from the fact that a Tamil kingdom had existed in pre-Portuguese times:

'Solve a modern problem in a modern way. Do not solve a modern problem in a medieval way. Do not try to solve a twentieth-century problem in a fifteenth-century manner. Bring to bear towards the solution of a twentieth-century problem a twentieth-century mind . . .'²

Instead he used the federal concept, and translating this into the Tamil language at first called for some mental effort; hence the Federal Party referred to itself in the English paraphrasing of its name from Tamil as 'the party which stands for a Ceylon Tamil state'. The party's opponents, especially the ACTC, accused it of trying to deceive the electorate with the promise of a separate state. The FP denied the charge, and in its propaganda campaigns explained this concept as implying a federal union, and the Tamil word '*sumushdi*', which in English was rendered as 'federation', came increasingly to be used.

In evidence that Chelvanayakam's lawyer placed before the election judge in the petition he filed against his victorious opponent in the 1952 general election, two members of the Department of Tamil of the University of Ceylon testified that the words '*Tamil Arasu*' meant a state within a federal union and not a separate sovereign state. The Bandaranaike-Chelvanayakam Pact of July 1957 and all subsequent pacts, agreements and understandings made it clear beyond all possible doubt that the FP was after a federal system and not a separate sovereign state.

The question of the place for the Tamil language *vis-à-vis* the Sinhala language had also to be articulated. Chelvanayakam had already expressed concern about the future of Tamil and declared in public that its elimination would be the Senanayake government's next step after disfranchising and decitizenising the hill country (Indian) Tamil plantation workers. In the same debate on August 19, 1948, on the

2. *Op. cit.*, cols 1765-6.

Indian and Pakistani Citizenship Bill, Chelvanayakam gave clear definition to the concept of parity of status for the two languages:

'... Let us make no difference where the two languages are concerned. Let us use these two languages in the courts, in the State Council [he meant Parliament] and in every other place where they can be used, and put them on an equal basis ... it would contribute towards the formation of one homogeneous nation, the only difference being that there would be two languages, languages which would have a right to the protection of this country, and of any government of this country ...'³

He accused J. R. Jayewardene, Minister of Finance at the time and chairman of the legislature's language committee, of seeking to 'relegate' the Tamil language to the Northern and Eastern Provinces and of providing for the Sinhala language to be the official language of the other seven provinces. The minister denied that this was the 'report' he had submitted, but Chelvanayakam insisted that his interpretation was correct.

An insight into Chelvanayakam's thinking can be seen in his words to Parliament moments before he made this charge:

'For years I had in mind the idea of a united Ceylon of a type different from that which the Honourable Minister of Finance has in mind. I have been dreaming of that until very lately.'

Chelvanayakam then added ominously that in view of the report of his committee, J. R. Jayewardene was

'... the father of "Pakistan" in Ceylon. He wants a Pakistan in those two Provinces without sovereignty for those Provinces. I said, well, if this is the line of conduct the government is going to pursue ...'

He did not carry on with his train of thought since at this point he was interrupted. Possibly he was about to say that the Tamil people would fight back because, further on in his speech, he alleged that the Senanayake government was trying to drive a wedge between the Ceylon Tamils and the Indian Tamils. He warned the government that it would not be able to control the 'possible consequences' of their attempts 'to divide the people'; not even 'the most powerful government' could do that. He added: 'He is a brave man who can prophesy the result.'

Between 1948 and 1951, the FP laid the groundwork for its programme of pursuing its goal of a federal Ceylon in which citizenship rights for all Tamils would be assured, the traditional homelands of the Tamil-speaking peoples recognised, and the Tamil language given

3. *Op. cit.*, cols 1762-3.

parity of status with Sinhala. The FP also rejected the national flag that had been adopted by the Ceylon Parliament, on the grounds that the dominating presence on the flag of the Sinhala lion holding a sword denoted the subjugation of the ethnic minorities, for whom a mere two stripes had been assigned outside of the precincts of the dominant lion.

These years, 1948–51, witnessed intense propaganda. Party spokesmen explained the central concept of the FP's philosophy. Language and territory are one; therefore state-aided Sinhala colonists in the traditional Tamil homelands were a threat to the Tamil nation's existence and continuance. Democracy is a matter of numbers; thus the deprivation of the civic rights of the Indian Tamil plantation workers, whom the FP were now referring to as 'hill country Tamils', was deliberately aimed at reducing Tamil representation in Parliament. The Sinhala lion in the national flag symbolised all too accurately the actual situation. The way out was a '*Tamil Arasu*' (Tamil state) within a federal union.

FP leaders dwelt constantly on the theme that the Tamils constituted a nation and wished to remain one. They should protect their identity and not allow themselves to be assimilated, which they alleged was the sinister design of Sinhala political leaders. Assimilation would, in any case, place the Tamils at the bottom of the Sinhalese caste ladder, so there was no reason to become part of it. These pronouncements were the ingredients of an emerging nationalism, albeit a defensive one, against Sinhala aggrandisement. Tamil consciousness and self-awareness were raised during these years.

Chelvanayakam became the focal point of the new nationalism. For one thing, the FP looked on him as the leader who could win Tamil support; he had a reputation for integrity and honesty, and was an all-island personality known to Sinhalese and Tamils alike. He had gained professional distinction in the law and obtained the legal rank of King's Counsel in 1947 from a pre-Independence Supreme Court which awarded it strictly on considerations of merit. It required approval by the judges of the Supreme Court and the leaders of the official and unofficial bar. The KC's silk gown lost much of its distinction after independence because some of the Prime Minister's recommendations were made on political grounds.

Another factor that ensured Chelvanayakam's prominence was that the FP was being funded largely from his earnings as a lawyer — obviously a drain on his finances. But he looked on his involvement as dedication to a cause for which he would give his time and money — indeed, his all. He did not see the matter primarily in political terms, but merely felt deeply that the void created by Ponnambalam's 'betrayal' had to be filled and that it was he whom destiny had summoned for that task. This was what he later (in 1953) told his friend

Sir Edward Jayatilleke, a retired Chief Justice, who had chided him for sacrificing his health and wealth for a political life when he could have become one of the island's few pre-eminent lawyers. Chelvanayakam responded that someone had to come forward to give leadership to the Tamil people. During this early phase of the FP, between 1949 and 1953, his contributions went to top up the modest offerings of sincere but generally impecunious supporters.⁴

Supporting the FP newspaper *Suthanthiran* (Freedom) was a more serious financial drain on Chelvanayakam. In return, the paper's many good editors always consulted him on the content of editorials and news reports. Its intention was to carry the party's message in the Tamil language to the mass of the Tamil people.⁵ It concentrated its fire on the ACTC, which was seen as the principal enemy, and explained the FP's interpretation of federalism. It carried several reports and articles on the economic feasibilities of the Tamil unit or units in a federal system. (The federal notion was severely criticised by the ACTC and left-wing parties on the grounds that the economy of the Ceylon Tamil heartland, the Jaffna peninsula, was based on money-order remittances from Tamil employees in the seven Sinhala provinces to their dependants in Jaffna because the peninsula was unproductive and economically unviable.)

Many of Chelvanayakam's friends and acquaintances remembered that during this phase he often dwelt on how 'the deficit provinces' (the two Tamil provinces) could be subsidised by the prosperous seven. His argument was that there were many prosperous as well as other Tamils in the seven provinces who contributed to the central government's coffers as taxpayers; also the hill country Tamils sustained the economy. Thus it was only proper that there should be a fair redistribution of income derived from the taxation of the wealthy Tamils (especially in the south) and the exploitation of the labour of the hill country Tamils.

Chelvanayakam was carried along by the strength of his convictions; he and his colleagues did not doubt that theirs was the true way. However, it took the FP some years and a severe setback at the general election in 1952 before the Ceylon Tamil electors became convinced by its message and the solution it proposed. Meanwhile, it continued its relentless propaganda and, more important, the party built up its organisational network which in due course reached nearly every village and all the towns in the two Tamil provinces. Meetings were

4. For confirmation of these and further views, see *Nesiah file*.

5. A complete archive of every copy of *Suthanthiran* is in the possession of E.R.A. Kanagaratnam, now resident in Kandy, who kindly provided me with a file of the important news items. These are all in the Tamil language.

conducted in the gardens of supporters, sometimes by the light of kerosene lanterns. There were rallies and conventions. Increasing numbers from among the villagers, the farming community and the lower rungs of the state bureaucracy attended. The idea of an autonomous Tamil state began to appeal to the Tamil mind.

The FP was formally inaugurated on 18 December 1949⁶ at a meeting held in the headquarters of the Government Clerical Service Union in Maradana, Colombo. In this organisation Ceylon Tamil clerical employees were a sizeable component; hence it was a significant venue. Chelvanayakam delivered the inaugural address — in which he did not, as some believe, hark back to the Tamil kingdom of the pre-Portuguese phase, although there was a passing reference to it. He emphasised that Tamils and Sinhalese had co-existed principally in their separate areas but that the two communities also mingled in each other's areas, and that it was the British imperial power which had imposed a unified system of government on both these areas. Nonetheless, their separate existences now entitled the Tamil-speaking peoples to an autonomous state comprising the two Tamil provinces. The British rulers, he said, had imposed a unitary constitution without regard to the demands of the Tamil-speaking people for adequate safeguards. The Tamil people had rejected the British-imposed Soulbury constitution at the general election of 1947. A section of the ACTC had betrayed the trust of their electors and joined the Senanayake government.

Chelvanayakam then stated that this was the reason for the inaugural meeting. He then spelled out his objective:

'We have embarked upon a mission, and God willing, we hope to fulfil our mission in our lifetime. Even if we fail to reach our goal in our lifetime, let us at the very least mobilise and marshal our younger generation to carry the banner forward and fulfil our mission ...'⁷

This mission was to be an *iyakkum*, i.e. a movement, he implied that the FP was not just any ordinary political party, but the *iyakkum* of the *Thamil Paysoom Makkal* (the Tamil-speaking people) and thus not of the *Thamil Makkal* (the Tamil people) only. He was thus trying to create a unity of all Tamil-speaking people in the whole island inclusive of the Tamil-speaking Muslims.

Chelvanayakam thus introduced into the island's political

6. For the details, see my 'The Tamil Federal Party in Ceylon Politics', *J. of Commonwealth Political Studies*, vol. 4 (July 1966); also *Ilankai Tamil Arasu Kadchi: Silver Jubilee Volume*, Jaffna, 1974, a publication largely in Tamil with English sections.
7. This inaugural address is fully reported in the language in which it was delivered, Tamil, on 18 Dec. 1949 in *Ilankai Tamil Arasu Kadchi*, pp. 1-11; the passage quoted is on p. 11.

vocabulary the term 'Tamil-speaking', and it was in this same address that he also introduced the phrase 'hill country Tamils', alluding thus to the decitizenised 'Indian Tamils'. From his point of view, these people were Ceylonese and not Indians. He concluded with a pledge that until the ITAK won its single goal of a federal union of Ceylon, it would refuse, like the Irish nationalists, to accept any office in any government. When summing up, he spoke memorable words best understood in the Tamil language. When translated (by the present writer) they read:

'We do not have wealth. We do not have powerful friends. Our goals can be achieved by weapons which call for strength of will and honesty of purpose. India's freedom was obtained with this righteous power. We cannot rely for our freedom only on outside support. We must remove the faults in our midst [i.e. casteism] if we are to be worthy of victory.'

From December 1949 to April 1951, when the FP had its first national convention, the three pillars of the movement — Chelvanayakam, Naganathan and Vanniasingham — addressed meetings throughout the Tamil-speaking areas. Public opinion there was awakened to the dangers facing the Tamil language, to the erosion of the demographic composition of the traditional homelands of the Tamil-speaking peoples, and to the need for the Tamils of the two provinces to express their solidarity with their hill country brethren. Chelvanayakam was aided by his lieutenants, Vanniasingham and Amirthalingam. Naganathan had to attend to his family medical practice in Colombo but continued in his role as the party's thinker and pamphleteer.

The Tamil public gave Chelvanayakam and his lieutenants a careful hearing — their meetings were well attended — but, apart from government servants and Jaffna farmers, many sections of the community remained dormant and apathetic or preferred to 'wait and see', hoping for the best; many too were plainly indifferent. However, a small segment were engaged in a painful re-appraisal.

During this phase, Ceylon Tamil fears that their community would be orphaned and leaderless were aggravated by Ponnambalam's unfortunate involvement in the Du Cane affair already referred to. Du Cane, a Dutch naval officer, complained that when Ponnambalam, as Minister of Industries, Industrial Research and Fisheries, visited the Netherlands to purchase a trawler, the *Raglan Castle*, he had suggested that he be provided with an 'inducement'. This had been leaked to members of the opposition in Colombo. The FP was not involved in the demand for a parliamentary investigation and declined to interest itself in the matter. However, the left opposition raised the matter in the House of Representatives through the accomplished lawyer

Dr Colvin R. de Silva, who called for a select committee to review the compromising documents. Ponnambalam stoutly denied the charge, but the Prime Minister left the matter open and Ponnambalam was never completely exonerated.

FP spokesmen exploited the unfortunate minister's discomfiture to tell the Ceylon Tamil electors that here was another reason why they should not trust Ponnambalam. But there was not a uniform reaction. The Ceylon Tamils kept their reservations to themselves. Some in fact thought that Ponnambalam had been 'clever', and why not? When Chelvanayakam referred at one of his public meetings to Ponnambalam as 'a thief', someone in the audience rose and said 'Even though he is a thief, he is a clever man', which could be taken as implying that the rights of the Tamils were still safe with him in the cabinet.

Suthanthiran, the FP newsheet, kept pressing the Tamil public to do some fresh thinking on the future of the Tamil-speaking people. The task was to get the Tamil public to abandon their old ways. For the past century the educated (and there were many) had become fixated on working as government employees. To think of a New Jerusalem in which Tamil people would give up their 'craze for clerkships', as the nationalist-minded Tamil bishop of the Church of South India in Jaffna, Sabapathy Kulendran, described his people's attachment to secure, pensionable public service employment, was a radicalisation of goals. An oft-repeated refrain of the FP was about the dangers of Sinhala state-aided colonisation. But this did not catch on. While the Ceylon Tamils became increasingly conscious of the discrimination being practised against them by the Sinhala-dominated state, they had not yet established the connection between language and territory. That only became a live issue after the language riots of 1956 and 1958 and after the enactment of the Sinhala Only Act in 1956 when Tamil men sent their families to the security of a haven in the traditional Tamil homeland.

However, the innately conservative Jaffna Tamils did not wish to alter their circumscribed world view. The constant rhetoric and propaganda of the ACTC and Ponnambalam was also a pull in the opposite direction. Ponnambalam was able to point to the tangible results of his responsive cooperation: a cement factory at Kankesanurair and a chemicals factory at Paranthan, both in the Northern Province, and a paper factory at Valaichenai in the Eastern Province. Tamil opinion at this stage seemed to be in favour of Chelvanayakam and Ponnambalam both being in Parliament, with Ponnambalam using Chelvanayakam as a lever to obtain more benefits from the government for the Ceylon Tamil areas.

The FP, on the other hand, wanted the ACTC and Ponnambalam

removed root and branch, and campaigned to that end. In its view, the ACTC was deceiving the Ceylon Tamils, and had betrayed the hill country Tamils. Thus, when it came to the first National Convention of the FP (1951), the leaders made certain that their stances were clearly stated in the resolutions adopted. This convention was held in Trincomalee, which had historic significance for the Ceylon Tamils. More important, it was a gesture to the Tamil-speaking people of the Eastern Province who had been neglected and had evolved in isolation. And as if to make clear that Jaffna would not dominate, Chelvanayakam stated that Trincomalee would be the capital city of the new Tamil autonomous state.

Chelvanayakam's statements at the convention,⁸ which he had prepared himself and delivered in the Tamil language, were moderate in tone. There was no condemnation of the Sinhala government or the Sinhala state, nor was there any appeal to Tamil chauvinism or patriotism. He spoke as the guardian of Tamil interests and explained how best these could be defended. He set out simply and straightforwardly the calamities that he saw ahead. He spoke with a heavy heart, knowing that in taking on the responsibility of launching the movement he would be dedicating the rest of his life to the cause. In addition, there was a distinct tone to his inaugural speech which is fully understood only when it is read in the lucid Tamil he used. It was clear he did not see himself as the usual party leader battling for votes. He gave the impression of being his people's guide and philosopher, even their Moses who had to lead them to the promised land.⁹ He had an air of dignified aloofness. This characteristic was readily discerned by his youthful lieutenant, Appapillai Amirthalingam, for whom he had much affection and whose opinions he respected. Amirthalingam was the first FP leader to refer to Chelvanayakam as 'the father' (of his people).

Seven resolutions were adopted by the convention.¹⁰ These were moderately and carefully phrased, evidence of a modern approach to a problem dating back to when the two communities first inhabited

8. For Chelvanayakam's complete address in Tamil, see section on 'Presidential Addresses by ITAK Presidents' in the *Ilankai Tamil Arasa Kadchi: Silver Jubilee Volume*, pp. 1-8.

9. The Rt. Rev. Lakshman Wickremasinghe, in his funeral oration on Chelvanayakam referred to him as 'a Moses'; the complete text of the Bishop's address is in the *Chelvanayakam file*. The *Ceylon Daily News Parliaments of Ceylon, 1960*, Colombo, n.d., referred to him as 'the Master' who 'has promised to lead them [the Tamil people] to their promised land'. This line was repeated in similar publications for 1965 and 1970.

10. The complete text of the resolutions (in English) is in the *Silver Jubilee Volume* in the section 'ITAK Resolutions', pp. 7-10.

the island together. Chelvanayakam had said on 19 August 1948: 'Bring to bear towards the solution of a twentieth-century problem a twentieth-century mind.' There was no question of 'a *Mahavamsa* ideology'.¹¹

The first resolution claimed for the Tamil-speaking people an 'unchallengeable title to nationhood' which, it added, could be achieved by 'a federal union with the Sinhalese'. Nationhood was derived from 'a separate historical past . . . at least as ancient and as glorious as that of the Sinhalese' and 'an unsurpassed classical heritage and a modern development of language' and by reason of the Tamils' 'territorial habitation of definite areas which constitute over one-third of this Island'. The resolution called for a plebiscite to determine boundaries; this would be on a par with the principle of self-determination. The resolution cited Canada, India, Switzerland and the Soviet Union, where the problem of multilingualism had been tackled by adopting the federal form of government.

The second resolution condemned the British-imposed Soulbury constitution as 'conducive to the subjection of the Tamil-speaking people'. It blamed the ills of the Tamils on the unitary system of that constitution which made them dependent 'on the goodwill and grace' of the majority Sinhalese; it would lead to 'the political subjection and national deterioration of the Tamil-speaking peoples'. They therefore had to 'work unceasingly' for the realisation of a federal union.

The third resolution underlined 'the political degradation of the Tamil-speaking people under the present [Soulbury] constitution' and 'their humiliation under the Citizenship Acts'. It referred to discriminatory legislation and, equally important, to 'deliberate administrative action' against the Tamil minority. This was one of the great shortcomings of the Soulbury constitution, that while it prohibited the legislature from enacting discriminatory legislation, the Tamil-speaking citizen had no redress in the event of administrative arbitrariness. The resolution stated that this problem too could be resolved by a federal union.

The fourth resolution invited attention to the dangers facing the Tamil language in view of the government's plan to relegate it to the Northern and Eastern provinces while Sinhalese would be recognised as the only official language in the other seven provinces. Tamil would soon become a subordinate language. Again the solution lay in 'an autonomous Tamil linguistic state' within a federal union. The argu-

11. *The Mahavamsa* was a historical chronicle of the Sinhalese composed by Buddhist monks about the fourth century AD. It contains frequent references to the Tamil invasions of the island — none of which Chelvanayakam and his followers exploited to justify their claims.

ment of FP speakers on public platforms was that the Tamil language could only progress and be preserved in an autonomous Tamil linguistic state. Herein lay Chelvanayakam's classic thesis that language and territory were one. This became clear in the fifth resolution which condemned 'the government's land development and colonisation policy as a threat to the very existence of the Tamil-speaking nation'. A federal constitution would save the Tamil-speaking people from 'the inevitable liquidation that awaits them'.

The sixth resolution rejected the national flag on the grounds that it gave undue prominence to the Sinhala lion, which 'correctly symbolises the present humiliating status of the Tamil-speaking people in Ceylon'. With the emphasis on the need to return to modernism, the resolution 'declared' that the flag should 'be framed on non-communal principles and designed on the highest ideals of the present age'.

The seventh and last resolution pledged that the autonomous linguistic state would be established on 'the principle of non-domination' so that no single group would have advantage over another. This was meant to reassure the Tamil-speaking Muslims. Under this resolution too, the non-Vellala Tamils¹² were guaranteed protection from discrimination.

The FP at this initial stage did not call for the merger of the Northern and Eastern provinces, accepting the fact of regional and district loyalties among Tamil-speaking people. Thus the seventh resolution concluded with the broad outline for the federal union that the FP envisaged: namely 'a broad-based system of regional self-governing districts planned somewhat on the cantonal structure of the Swiss constitution'. The FP held to this view in its manifestos at the general elections of 1952 and 1956. Only after 1956, when the Sinhalese rioted against the Tamils in the aftermath of the Sinhala Only Act and the peaceful *satyagraha* of the FP on Galle Face Green in Colombo (see below, p. 80), did Chelvanayakam change the demand from cantonal arrangements to a unified Tamil North-East Province. He insisted on this premise being accepted in the negotiations preceding the conclusion of his Pact with the Prime Minister, S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike. He had come to realise that such cantons would encourage the Tamils to remain parochial and disunited. The merging of the contiguous Tamil-speaking areas would be conducive to a unified Tamil nationalism.

12. The *Vellalas*, equivalent to the *Goigamas* among the Sinhalese, are the topmost cultivator caste. Among the Tamils, due to Brahminical and Hindu influences, there are a variety of non-*Vellala* castes who are economically poor. Buddhism among the Sinhalese has helped to mitigate the rigours of the caste system, which is otherwise similar to that of the Tamils.

These seven resolutions contained the substance of the federalist platform which in the years after 1956 became the ruling passion of the Tamils of the two provinces, and which Chelvanayakam embodied. The new Tamil movement had been given its impetus and the Tamil Congressism of Ponnambalam faced a difficult challenge. Only in 1956 was the Tamil Congress driven into oblivion by the ire of the FP.

Chelvanayakam was virulently attacked by the ACTC's leadership, and G. G. Ponnambalam in particular accused him of using 'an offensive and defensive weapon of selective hearing' (he was in fact slightly hard of hearing). In Jaffna, Ponnambalam chastised him as 'a weekend patriot and vacation politician'. This implication that he spent the rest of his time in his legal practice in Colombo applied equally to Ponnambalam himself. Ponnambalam also claimed to have brought Dr Naganatham 'into the limelight from the obscurity of a suburban dispensary'. For the FP leaders Ponnambalam was simply the 'traitor' who had divided the Tamil community by supporting legislation to deprive the hill country Tamils of citizenship.

The Prime Minister D.S. Senanayake also used several public speeches to try and taint Chelvanayakam's public image, alleging that Ponnambalam had asked him for a portfolio for Chelvanayakam (referred to earlier); Chelvanayakam for his part denied that he had received such an invitation.

Senanayake's strategy was a plain and straightforward attempt to co-opt the Tamil leadership. When Chelvanayakam proved intractable and became a 'headache' to the government, as the retired Chief Justice Sir Arthur Wijeyewardene once remarked to him, attempts were made (probably at Senanayake's bidding) by the Chief Justice of the time, Sir John Howard, to persuade him to accept a Supreme Court judgeship. He had also received a letter from an intermediary, E. A. P. Wijeyeratne, soon after the general election of 1947 inviting him to accept office in the Senanayake government, to which he had not replied. He turned down the Supreme Court offer.

Chelvanayakam and his party colleagues used the years 1947-52 holding propaganda meetings and explaining to the people the need for a federal constitution. With the high level of organisation of the party network in the north and east, Chelvanayakam expected a clear victory for the ITAK when Parliament was dissolved in May 1952, but not only he but most of the party stalwarts suffered defeat. The only seats won were those of Vanniasingham and S. Sivapalan (Trincomalee).

Dr I. D. S. Weerawardana (a political scientist) observed that the FP did not take sufficient care to explain the meaning and implications of federalism;¹³ the FP, he said, concentrated its exposition of federalism

13. See I. D. S. Weerawardana, 'The General Elections in Ceylon, 1952', *Ceylon Historical Journal*, vol. II, nos 1 and 2 (July and Oct. 1952), pp. 111-78.

more on a 'nationalistic or communal rather than on an administrative or cultural level'. The concept had not been made clear enough, and the demand had become confused 'with secession or separate statchood'. However there were other reasons too. The Tamil people had still to feel the impact of the Sinhala movement. Many of them placed their faith in the United National Party and its Prime Minister Dudley Senanayake, believing — vainly, as it turned out — that a few cabinet portfolios would ensure them a place in the political firmament.

THE POLITICAL STRATEGY OF PROTEST

The political party deployed six strategies towards seeking its objectives. First and foremost, Chelvanayakam was the charismatic leader, and under his aura it remained electorally the most powerful and influential in the Tamil-speaking Northern and Eastern Provinces from the general election of 1956 onwards. For the twenty-one years till his death in 1977, Chelvanayakam was the acknowledged leader of the Tamils of the two provinces, and no political leader — Sinhalese, Tamil or Muslim — has held a commanding position in post-independence Ceylonese politics for so long. His party, the FP/ITAK, won a majority of seats in the Tamil areas of the north-east in five successive general elections.

A second strategy was to use Parliament to propagate the FP's goals and speak to the Tamil people and the outside world. A third was, when occasion arose, to vote the government out of office or assist in the formation of a new one. Fourthly, Chelvanayakam's charisma and the party's own organisational network were used to launch extra-parliamentary campaigns of civil disobedience to coerce the government in power to make adjustments with it on its principal demands. These campaigns were launched at intervals and were dependent on various objective circumstances.

Fifthly, the party succeeded in persuading the vast majority of the Tamil people in Ceylon to identify themselves with its stated objectives. Thus during the entire period 1956-77 the party and the majority of Tamil people were virtually one and the same. Whenever it committed itself to struggle for particular objectives or made historic decisions, they were made on behalf of the Tamil people. Governments thus dealt with the party as if it represented the general will of the Tamil nation.

And lastly, there evolved within the party a triumvirate possessing remarkable skills who from 1960 onwards shaped the party's strategy. As well as Chelvanayakam, who continued to be at the helm, there were M. Tiruchelvam, QC, later the FP's Minister of Local Government in Dudley Senanayake's 'National Government', and Appapillai Amirthalingam, who magnetised the Tamil people with his skills as a

public speaker; he became Leader of the Opposition in the 1977 Parliament as leader of the TULF, which was the largest single opposition party.

The prospect of obtaining ethnically autonomous Tamil-speaking units within a federal framework receded as evidence increased of Sinhala determination to keep the island as a unitary entity. In the Sinhala mind federalism and regional autonomy became identified with separatism and secession; in any case these constitutional mechanisms were perceived by the Sinhalese as a first step towards the supposed Tamil goal of a separate sovereign state. Chelvanayakam, for his part, protested that 'only under a federal system can the Tamil-speaking people save themselves from extinction'. He denied the charge that federalism implied the division of the country. On 14 June 1956 during the second reading stage of the (Sinhala) Official Language Bill, he explained his concept of federalism to Parliament:

'A federal constitution can be and has been worked under a democratic set-up and it does not mean a division of the country at all. The division of a country will be a division of it into two sovereign states. But under one central government irreconcilable units of the country have to be resolved and a compromise brought about, and that can only be by the adoption of federalism. No doubt it will mean a division of the powers which the central government exclusively enjoys into some powers to be exercised by the federating unit and some powers by the central federal government.'

And to make it doubly clear that neither he nor his party sought a separate state, Chelvanayakam asserted in the same speech:

'It will be a complete misnomer to call federalism a separation; federalism is a union. Under a federal set-up the preservation and the maintenance of the integrity of smaller units can be assured without in any way taking away the sovereignty of the central government of the country.'

Thus in 1956, with a fresh mandate from the Tamil electors of the Northern and Eastern Provinces, he pressed for a federation of the separate Tamil-speaking units (i.e. those same provinces).

The 1956 general elections illustrate the principle that intransigence by an ethnic majority — e.g. the Hindus in India, the Greeks in Cyprus and the West Pakistanis in Pakistan before the break-away of Bangladesh — produces an escalation of demands by the minority. In 1956, the FP sought to do no more than raise Tamil consciousness and have the economic alternatives for the Tamils safeguarded in their traditional homelands. These Tamil homelands were not to be constituted as a continuous Tamil territory. Instead the FP manifesto of 1956 stated that the form of federal government it sought was on the Swiss cantonal model:

The government in Switzerland is carried on through small area units called cantons. In like manner the Tamil state and the Sinhalese state would each be made up of several cantons and each of these cantons would have autonomous powers.

Also underlined was the desire for each of the Tamil areas to constitute a separate Tamil entity:

It would not therefore be possible for the Batticaloa district to override Trincomalee district; or Jaffna to rule Batticaloa; or Mannar to impose on Vavuniya. Besides, Tamil pockets in Sinhalese areas like Puttalam, Wellawatta, Nawalapitiya, Hatton etc. would become component cantons or half-cantons of the Tamil state; while Gal Oya, Tammanakadai etc. might become Sinhalese cantons in the Sinhalese state. These doubtful areas would be settled by a census.¹

The Tamil state conceived of would be a collection of cantons, as would the Sinhala state. The Tamil state was still a nebulous concept, collectively a Tamil nation but far from being a single, continuous Tamil territorial unit.

Between the passing of the Official Language Act (Sinhala) of June 1956 and the FP's Trincomalee convention of August that year, FP opinion underwent a major change. Tamil consciousness — it was no more than that — had changed into a Tamil subnationalism. Chelvanayakam and the FP now resolved that the Tamil areas of the Northern and Eastern Provinces should constitute one or more Tamil units. Why this escalation? Sinhala inflexibility was a prime factor. The FP under Chelvanayakam's leadership had staged a peaceful *satyagraha* against the Sinhala Only Act on Galle Face Green in Colombo,² an open space within a stone's throw of Parliament, on the day (6 June 1956) when the parliamentary debate on it began. The Federalists had earlier asked permission to hold their protest within the precincts of the House of Representatives but this was refused by the Prime Minister, S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike. The latter said that he had no doubt Chelvanayakam's intentions were 'most peaceful', but he feared that such actions 'are not merely indiscreet but are most dangerous to the security of the country'. He added that he had reliable information that a counter-action was being planned and there was

1. From the ITAK manifesto. The extract is taken from Weerawardana, p. 185.
2. The protest resulted in some Sinhalese elements venting their anger on the *satyagrahis* and other Tamils going peacefully about their business; some of the former were seriously injured by rocks pelted at them. C. C. Dissanayake, the Deputy Inspector-General of Police, informed me that Bandaranaike had requested him to get his men *not* to intervene. Chelvanayakam told me that when the FP MPs returned to Parliament bandaged and with bloodstained clothes, Bandaranaike greeted them with 'You got what you deserved.'

'no guarantee against some misguided persons exploiting the occasion to spark lawlessness'.³

On the other hand a Sinhala activist had been allowed to fast to death on the steps of Parliament because the original version of the bill provided for 'the reasonable use of the Tamil language', whereas the protester wished it to be a straightforward bill to make Sinhala the only official language. The Prime Minister had included in this original Sinhala bill detailed provisions similar to those he subsequently introduced in the Tamil Language (Special Permissions) Act of August 1958. These detailed provisions required, in brief, that correspondence from the Tamil public be answered in Sinhalese by state bureaucrats, with a Tamil translation; that all public examinations be conducted in both Sinhalese and Tamil; and that Tamil be used for certain administrative purposes in the Northern and Eastern Provinces. Bandaranaike now found himself right in the vortex of Sinhala chauvinism. His parliamentary group (the MEP) was in no mood for compromise and insisted that he abandon the provisions for the use of Tamil. Thus the Sinhala Only Act was enacted as law without the Tamil provisions. It was not till August 1958 that the abandoned provisions for Tamil were enacted into law.

With hindsight, even an ethnic federalism might not have satisfied Ceylon Tamil aspirations, since problems would certainly have arisen to heighten inter-ethnic tension — the distribution of finances, the proper status to be assigned to the two languages, recruitment to the public sector, admissions to universities, the composition of the state's security personnel and the role of a judiciary which would always have a Sinhala majority. The Tamil mind would have rebelled at these constraints.

The Sinhala leadership would have had to demonstrate to their Sinhala constituency that even under federalism they would refrain from a sell-out to the Tamils, and this in turn would have engendered an auction between the major Sinhala parties, as actually happened, to the detriment of Ceylon Tamil interests. Sinhala opinion might then have thought that the Tamils should learn Sinhala, just as they did English, since they had proved that by dint of study they could perform well and even excel in examinations. But it soon became apparent that the study of Sinhala was not the only obstacle that the Tamils would have to overcome. Sinhala Buddhist revivalism not only came to be a question of the survival of the Sinhala people but it also espoused the myth that the Buddha had deemed that the Sinhalese should be the

3. *CDN*, 5 June 1956. C. C. Dissanayake (see note 2) expressed to me and Bishop Lakshman Wickremasinghe his anger at the Prime Minister's 'blatant lie' that the police had failed to act, when in fact this had been due to his explicit instructions.

preservers of *theravada* Buddhism. In such a world-view the historical Dravidian foe had no place.

The FP, in their propaganda drive, tried to make this clear to the Tamil people and were largely successful. However, some prosperous and influential Colombo Tamils took a negative view of Chelvanayakam, whom they had always regarded as one of their own; consequently they now found his defensive Tamil nationalism disturbing. They preferred a gradualistic acceptance of Sinhala, a proposition they felt to be negotiable.

The failure to compromise on the Sinhala Act, despite the mandate the Prime Minister had obtained for the reasonable use of the Tamil language, was one aspect of incipient Sinhala hegemonism. The violent response organised by elements within Bandaranaike's MEP to the Galle Face *satyagraha*, and the resulting attacks on law-abiding and peaceful Tamils in Colombo going about their daily business and on Tamil settlements in various parts of the island including the sensitive new Gal Oya irrigation scheme in the Eastern Province, made the FP move with urgency towards a demand for autonomy for the Tamil-speaking Northern and Eastern Provinces.

At this stage there was still no request for a merged Tamil-speaking North-east Province; nonetheless, Tamil consciousness had moved a step closer to a clearly demarcated regional autonomy within a federal framework. Thus at this point Tamil subnationalism had come to stay. At the same time, Chelvanayakam was in a position to persuade his party and the Tamil-speaking people that their future lay in a working relationship of peaceful co-existence with the Sinhala people.

The Party next resolved to have a convention in August 1956 in Trincomalee where it would set out its minimum demands for a settlement, and the accompanying 'pilgrimage' or 'footmarch' to Trincomalee from cities, towns and villages all over the Tamil-speaking north and east began in July. Federal Party MPs took charge of each of the 'footmarches'. Chelvanayakam chose to head processions at various strategic points, and wherever he appeared he was hailed as 'the prophet-seer of the Tamil people', whom he had warned against the dangers ahead when the Indian Tamil plantation workers were disfranchised, pointing out that this enactment was the first in a series designed to reduce the Tamil-speaking people to subject status. Chelvanayakam was now recognised as the Tamil people's undisputed leader. His decisions were accepted by the high-level committees of the FP, however much discussion had already taken place in which he had had no part, but there were also occasions when he accepted views with which he disagreed, he would then acknowledge later that the party had assessed the situation correctly.

Trincomalee was selected as the venue of the historic convention

because Chelvanayakam had said that it should be the capital of the autonomous Tamil region; he and his party had now moved from *cantonal* to *regional* federalism. He was of course fully aware of the strategic significance of Trincomalee: it was necessary to choose a neutral place, more or less equidistant from Jaffna and Batticaloa, which would be acceptable to both groups of Tamils, and he saw this as a way of forging the unity of the Tamil-speaking people. To reinforce his position, he convinced the Tamil university movement which was burgeoning at this phase that the Tamil university that was being agitated for should be sited not in Jaffna, the premier city of the Tamil heartland, but in Trincomalee. The movement had the support of sturdy individualists such as Professor A. W. Mailvaganam, Professor G. Sinnetamby and Sir Kanthiah Vaithianathan, the retired Permanent Secretary to the Ministry of External Affairs, besides other prominent personalities. Although they personally favoured Jaffna, they eventually deferred to the view of Chelvanayakam, which was strengthened by a further argument: that it was necessary for Trincomalee to have a Tamil-speaking majority, which could be ensured by siting the Tamil university in this port city and thus bringing more Tamil-speaking settlers into the vicinity.

Between 1965 and 1970 J. R. Jayewardene, then Minister of State, indicated to Chelvanayakam that the Dudley Senanayake 'National Government' was prepared to establish a university in Jaffna forthwith, but Chelvanayakam declined. Eventually Mrs Bandaranaike's UF government established not a separate Tamil university but the Jaffna campus as part of the University of Peradeniya. By this time, the flourishing Tamil university movement of the late 1950s and the 1960s had petered out.

The Trincomalee convention of August 1956 became the sheet-anchor for the Tamil claim during the phase up to 1976, in which year the Tamil leadership was confronted by appalling anti-Tamil pogroms and Sinhala legislative, administrative, educational, linguistic and employment discrimination (the last-named in both the public and private sectors) and became convinced that a separate and sovereign Tamil state was the only way to satisfy Tamil aspirations. The convention adopted four resolutions of far-reaching significance — far-reaching because they were to provide the basis for pacts with two Prime Ministers, S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike in 1957 and Dudley Senanayake in 1965. It was also the basis for an understanding in April 1960 with the SLFP leaders C. P. de Silva, Felix Dias Bandaranaike and A. P. Jayasuriya; this understanding was approved by Mrs Sirimavo Bandaranaike when Chelvanayakam met her after the negotiations were concluded. The four resolutions requested parity of status for the Sinhala and Tamil languages, the cessation of state-aided

Sinhala colonisation of the traditional Tamil-speaking homelands, regional autonomy within a federal framework for the Tamil provinces, and restoration of the citizenship and franchise rights of the hill country Tamils. These demands represented the highwater-mark of a new Tamil subnationalism, and the abandonment of the earlier campaign of raising Tamil consciousness with a view to seeking coexistence with the Sinhala people through communal electorates or fifty-fifty representation in the legislature.

A change had come over the FP between the general election of April 1956 and the convention four months later. Anti-Tamil rioting by Sinhala hoodlums made Tamil people realise that they would be better protected in their traditional homelands. The failure even to provide for 'the reasonable use of the Tamil language' convinced the Tamils that only persons with a knowledge of Sinhala, that is the Sinhalese themselves, would have opportunities of employment in the public sector. Many Tamils quickly became disillusioned also with Gandhian methods of civil disobedience. Not only did they have no positive effect, but they provoked violence from Sinhala chauvinists. Sinhala violence, it seemed, could only be countered by organised armed resistance. Yet despite the setbacks Tamil opinion was agreed in going along with Chelvanayakam.

The conviction that armed resistance was the answer receded into the background for the time being. Chelvanayakam was able to channel protest along the non-violent path as long as he held the political stage. However, a new generation of Tamils reared in proximity to Sinhala chauvinism and violence was growing up to become the militants and freedom fighters of the 1970s, and by the time of Chelvanayakam's death in March 1977 the non-violent Tamil resistance had been overtaken by militant Tamil youth committed to armed struggle and protracted civil war.

When the non-violent Galle Face *satyagraha* of June 1956 led by Chelvanayakam was attacked by Sinhala chauvinists, neither he nor his FP supporters had expected such a savage and bloody reaction. However, he viewed the consequences with equanimity. The *satyagraha* protest had been proof that Sinhala superiority in numbers could not steamroller the Tamil minority. Nor would the Tamils accept Parliament's enactment of the Official Language Act making Sinhala the only state language and reconcile themselves to the consequences. At the height of the violence of June 1956, the Prime Minister asked Chelvanayakam to make a radio appeal to the Tamil people for calm. Chelvanayakam declined.

The Trincomalee convention presented an ultimatum to Bandaranaike: that if the FP's demands were not met, the Tamil people would launch a direct action campaign of non-violent civil

disobedience — in which Chelvanayakam's charisma was expected to play a great part. His followers did not believe that Bandaranaike would agree to a compromise settlement, and thus they expected the worst. Chelvanayakam's deputy in Parliament, Vanniasingham, spoke from public platforms urging the Tamil people to prepare for a prolonged struggle — for example, by storing their grain harvest. The FP decided it needed 25,000 volunteers for its campaign and began recruiting. A section of FP parliamentarians thought that a longer time was needed to prepare for the campaign if it was to be sustained and disciplined, but Chelvanayakam was not willing to accept any delay, and fixed the deadline for 20 August 1957.

The Tamil salariat in Colombo and the Sinhala provinces strongly supported the proposed strategy and contributed to it financially. Although they feared a recurrence of Sinhala violence, they were not willing to be cowed by that threat. FP workers asked Tamils in the Sinhala provinces to move to the Tamil homelands; if they could not do so, at least the women and children should go. It was apparent that changes had taken place in Tamil thought-processes. A sense of separate identity had arisen in what an earlier Tamil leadership envisaged as a bi-ethnic and essentially bilingual island country. Now a new Tamil leadership was emerging which conceived of a separate Tamil homeland, a refuge which could protect the Tamil people from Sinhala violence in the seven Sinhala provinces and from Sinhala encroachment upon traditional Tamil territories in the north and east. In effect, an earlier Tamil subnationalism within the framework of an all-island nationalism was in its incipient phase of being metamorphosed into a defensive Tamil nationalism concerned with the Tamil homelands. Many adaptive Tamils and even liberal-minded Sinhalese viewed the FP's and Chelvanayakam's policies more as a device to safeguard the Tamil language and the traditional homelands of the Tamil-speaking peoples, and thus preserve the Tamil identity, than as any kind of attempt to undermine the Sinhala position. The question of a self-contained and independent Tamil nationalism challenging Sinhala nationalism did not arise.

The FP was assisted in its widespread campaign by many committed volunteers. It established branches throughout the north and the east, and Chelvanayakam and Vanniasingham frequently visited villages and towns in those parts to explain to the people how a federal system would protect their territory and language. They spent much time in the Eastern Province, since it was there that inroads were being made into the traditional Tamil homeland. Their message carried most weight with the cultivators, the landless, the land-hungry and the unemployed educated youth. It was these sections of the Tamil population especially that felt deprived in the context of the Sinhala-

dominated government's decided preference for Sinhala colonists. Chelvanayakam explained (to the author) that the comfortable 'trousered people' of the Eastern Province — in other words, the middle and lower-middle classes — were not affected by his party's repeated cautionings. But in a few years, the people of this province realised that they were in the actual frontline of the Sinhala attack.

At first the Prime Minister was indifferent to the FP's Trincomalee ultimatum. He still had in mind his earlier plan for provincial councils which he had tried unsuccessfully to persuade the UNP cabinet of D. S. Senanayake to accept when he was Minister of Local Government and Health. He confided to his friend Wilmot Perera, MP, that provincial councils and the 'reasonable use of Tamil' provisions in the first version of his Sinhala Only bill would be his solution to the Tamil problem, but he kept postponing action. Bandaranaike for his part was unconvinced of his own Sinhala policy, being too rational to conceive of a unilingual state. He did not think that the Sinhala language would be the vehicle for modernising the island. In an interview with a delegation of University of Ceylon students in 1955, he said that he expected to implement Sinhala as the language of administration but not as a medium of instruction in the University.⁴

Bandaranaike's decision to find a resolution to the stalemate as the FP's deadline approached was no surprise. A substantial campaign in sections of the English-language press and intervention by prominent personalities who were friends of the two leaders persuaded the Prime Minister to request the FP to enter into negotiations with him on their demands. These began towards the end of April 1957, and on 26 July that year the Bandaranaike-Chelvanayakam Pact was signed. Chelvanayakam was well aware that he had not obtained all that he had previously insisted on. He described the agreement as an 'interim adjustment', a step towards the ultimate goal of a federal state, and many Sinhalese and Tamils hoped that the conflict would be settled in this way. The Pact left the hill country Tamil question unresolved, but this was because Sauviamoorthy Thondaman (President of the largest Indian Tamil organisation, the Ceylon Workers' Congress) had requested Chelvanayakam to let the Prime Minister negotiate with him — so that his standing with his people would remain undisturbed.

Chelvanayakam was not wholly pleased with the agreement, as was apparent when he returned home from the signing ceremony. He had been wearied by the protracted negotiations. The failure to obtain a single merged Tamil-speaking North-east Province left him dismayed;

4. As told to me by some of the members of the delegation at that time: they said that Bandaranaike was contemptuous of the Faculty of Oriental Studies, some of whose members were vociferously demanding full implementation of Sinhala.



Above, Chelvanayakam entering S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike's office for negotiations on the pact between them, July 1957. *Right*, Bandaranaike after the signing of the pact. C. Vanniasingham is in the centre of the group directly behind him, with S. M. Rasamanickam to his right. Chelvanayakam is at the rear.





Above, Chelvanayakam with Jawaharlal Nehru, Colombo, 1960. *Below*, with R. M. Ramachandran, one-time Chief Minister of Tamil Nad, 1970.





A crowd greeting Chelvanayakam at Colombo airport in 1961, when he was on his way to Britain to be treated for Parkinson's disease. The police escort is because he was officially in detention at the time.



Mr and Mrs Chelvanayakam greeting J. R. Jayewardene, then Minister of State in Dudley Senanayake's 'national government' in which the FP was the principal component, August 1966. (Jayewardene later became Prime Minister and Sri Lanka's first executive President.)

he said that narrow district parochialisms could emerge in the absence of an all-embracing Tamil region.

For a few weeks after the signing, a sense of hope and euphoria prevailed. The FP held a convention in Batticaloa and obtained approval for the Pact. There were still many details of the agreement to be worked out, but Chelvanayakam was hailed as the saviour of the Tamil people. Trouble, however, was to follow. He had expected Bandaranaike to keep his word, but was to be disappointed. Bandaranaike's problem did not lie in any failure of will on his part. He had to contend, rather, with the campaign against the Pact by the UNP, who accused him of having agreed to a division of the country and of undermining the status of Sinhala as the only official language. Worse than the UNP's chauvinism was the narrow communalism of the Sinhala bureaucracy. They determinedly undermined every concession to Tamil public servants that Chelvanayakam succeeded in negotiating with Bandaranaike in the months after the Pact. Tamil public servants therefore became increasingly sceptical as to whether the Prime Minister truly intended to implement the Pact, and they put pressure on Chelvanayakam and the FP parliamentarians to renew preparations for a direct action *satyagraha* campaign.

The situation reached crisis proportions with the deliberately provocative decision by officials of the Ministry of Transport to send buses of the state-owned Ceylon Transport Board to the Tamil areas with the Sinhala 'Sri' lettering on their number-plates.⁵ Chelvanayakam protested at this but to no avail, and it slowly dawned on him and the FP that the Prime Minister was backsliding from his promises. As evidence of his indecisiveness shortly after the signing, Bandaranaike sent Stanley de Zoysa, his Minister of Finance, to persuade Chelvanayakam to agree to exclude the areas affected by the Gal Oya irrigation scheme in the Eastern Province from the control of the council for that province. Bandaranaike, to pre-empt UNP opposition, had said without consulting Chelvanayakam that major irrigation schemes would come under the jurisdiction of the central government. Chelvanayakam agreed to this reservation because immediate implementation of the Pact was his main goal.

Chelvanayakam led two anti-*Sri* campaigns in which he himself spread tar over the Sinhala *Sri* on the number-plates of buses, one in Jaffna town in the Northern Province and the other in Batticaloa in the Eastern Province in March and April 1958 respectively. He was charged in the Batticaloa magistrate's court and sentenced to one

5. S. Ponniah's *Satyagraha: The Freedom Movement of the Tamils in Ceylon*, Jaffna, 1963, provides the most detailed and informed account of the *satyagrahas* of 1956-61.

week's imprisonment, which he duly served. No Tamil leader had previously been gaoled for a political offence, let alone a distinguished QC, and this redounded to the FP's credit. When he was released, Batticaloa greeted him like a hero.

After the anti-*Sri* campaigns of March and April 1958, events moved on to the flashpoint of the rioting and the declaration of a state of emergency in May. The Prime Minister failed to halt the momentum; he seemed to drift while at the same time claiming that he was trying to 'assuage' the Tamils. Chelvanayakam for his part reacted to the changing situation, in which the chauvinism of the Buddhist clergy and laity and political racism on the part of the UNP were much in evidence. The UNP's journal, the *Nation*, persistently carried racial incitements against the Tamil people. In addition there were forces within the government determined to embarrass the Prime Minister. There was no one to help him out of the impasse.

The second anti-*Sri* campaign in April 1958 brought matters to a head. Neither Chelvanayakam nor Bandaranaike wanted a confrontation, but the Prime Minister had been outpaced by forces hostile to the Pact within and outside the government. J. R. Jayewardene, ably assisted by Dudley Senanayake, led the UNP's opposition. Mrs Vimala Wijewardene (Minister of Health) and the Buddhist high priest of the historic Kelaniya temple, the Ven. Mapiitagama Buddharakhita Thero, were a thorn in the Prime Minister's side since he had failed to accede to Buddharakhita's request for patronage.

At first, Chelvanayakam opposed his party's decision to launch the second anti-*Sri* campaign, but he later decided to go along with it and agreed that the party had judged rightly. In May the FP held its convention in Vavuniya at which it was resolved to launch a direct action campaign of *satyagraha*. Even as the convention was completing its sessions, disturbances broke out in the Sinhala provinces. The Prime Minister faced Buddhist monks protesting on the lawn of his private residence at Rosmead Place, Colombo. They demanded from him a written abrogation of his Pact with Chelvanayakam. The Prime Minister duly complied.

Chelvanayakam was extremely distressed at this turn of events. When first asked, at the time, what he would do if the Pact were renounced, as was expected to happen as soon as the Buddhist monks gathered at the Prime Minister's house, he said that he and his party were 'prepared for such an eventuality', but when the news came through, in spite of showing signs of distress he would only reiterate that he and his party were prepared.⁶ He probably meant that they

6. I was alone with him in his house at the time.

would return to their extra-parliamentary forms of civil protest, civil disobedience and non-cooperation. But this would once more be an uphill and probably doomed task.

The problem in all Chelvanayakam's negotiations with Sinhala leaders was that the more rational and decent of them thought that they could persuade their followers to go along with them in the interests of national harmony. But these followers, including local Members of Parliament, were themselves under intense pressure from constituents, and finally the leaders had to give way, whatever their original intentions may have been. Bandaranaike in 1957 and Dudley Senanayake in 1965 had good reason to want to honour their commitment (as had J. R. Jayewardene, as President, in regard to District Development Councils in 1980). But in the end they were carried away by forces they themselves had unleashed and were unable to control. Felix Dias Bandaranaike, it seems clear, never intended to honour his undertakings (1960). As Prime Minister from 1960, Mrs Bandaranaike, according to Chelvanayakam herself, did not participate in any of the negotiations herself but entrusted them to her ministers.

The riots that followed in May 1958 created in the country an unprecedented spate of violence, the details of which have been amply recorded elsewhere.⁷ After four days of inexplicable delay, the Prime Minister had the Governor-General declare a state of emergency on 28 May. The FP and an insignificant ginger group representing an extreme form of Sinhala chauvinism, the *Jathika Vimukthi Peramuna* (National Liberation Front),⁸ were proscribed. The leaders of the FP, including its Members of Parliament, were placed under house arrest. Chelvanayakam was confined to his house, 16 Alfred House Gardens, and could not communicate with the public until the detention order was lifted in the latter part of 1958.

In August 1958, the Prime Minister had Parliament enact the Tamil Language (Special Provisions) Act, claiming that this was in keeping with one component of his agreement with Chelvanayakam. He also insisted that the Act was an implementation of the mandate he had obtained for 'the reasonable use of the Tamil language', but Chelvanayakam disagreed, especially since it did not provide for Tamil as the language of administration in the Northern and Eastern Provinces. S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike had fulfilled the worst fears of the sceptical Tamil public that he could not be trusted.

Chelvanayakam emerged unscathed from all this. The Tamil people

7. Tarzie Vittachi, *Emergency '58* (London: André Deutsch, 1958).

8. The later insurrectionist *Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna* (People's Liberation Front) should not be confused with the JVP mentioned here, which was a paper tiger created by newspapers opposed to Bandaranaike.

credited him with seeking a serious and honourable compromise, and blamed the Prime Minister and the UNP opposition led by J. R. Jayewardene for the Pact's failure. However, by 1965 Jayewardene had changed his position owing to the uncertain political situation in the last phase of Mrs Bandaranaike's 1960-5 government. He understood that Chelvanayakam's support was essential in the approaching general election of 1965, and initiated discussions on colonisation and the traditional homelands issue with him and his principal adviser in Colombo, M. Tiruchelvam, QC. In these pre-election discussions, Jayewardene understood that the demographic composition of the two provinces should be maintained to preserve their Tamil-speaking majority. When, at the conclusion of the 1965 general election, the party situation was unclear and FP support was vital for the formation of a stable government led by the UNP, he actively participated in the negotiations leading to the signing of the Dudley Senanayake-Chelvanayakam Pact of March 1965 which was in effect a modified version of the Pact of 1957.

To return to the events of late 1958, after the lifting of the state of emergency: since the membership of the FP at the higher echelons comprised professional people — mostly lawyers and other public- and private-sector employees — and self-employed farmers and traders, the party decided to suspend its activities for a while until its members could recuperate financially. More important, Bandaranaike's position as Prime Minister was fast weakening. His cabinet was split in two with the right wing, led by the most maverick of the ministers, W. Dahanayake, demanding the expulsion of the Sinhala chauvinist/Marxist ministers, Philip Gunawardene and P. H. William de Silva, who professed an indigenised form of Marxism. The right wing succeeded, and the evidence suggests that the Prime Minister did not want to lose Philip Gunawardene. Politically crippled and unable to govern effectively, S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike was finally gunned down by a young Buddhist monk who had been manipulated by disillusioned former supporters of the Prime Minister.

W. Dahanayake succeeded as Prime Minister, but could not maintain a stable government and had Parliament dissolved. The general election that followed in March 1960 resulted in a hung Parliament, which gave Chelvanayakam the chance to employ his second technique, the alternative to the extraparliamentary agitation with which he and his party had achieved some results in 1956-9. The FP held the balance in the new Parliament, and Chelvanayakam was urged by his immediate supporters and by influential Colombo Tamils to press his advantage to the full and obtain for the Tamil people as many of their demands as was possible. The Colombo Tamils, who in class terms

were bound by self-interest to their Sinhala bourgeois counterparts, urged him to place his trust in the 'politically immaculate' Dudley Senanayake, who, they reasoned, would never let the Tamils down. They were correct insofar as Senanayake would safeguard the generality of bourgeois interests, affecting both Sinhalese and Tamil. But he was no national leader.

The Tamils in the Sinhala provinces outside Colombo came to express their fears to Chelvanayakam at his home in Alfred House Gardens from the remotest corners of the Sinhala country, as individuals and as representatives of *ad hoc* Tamil associations or professional bodies. They pleaded that only Dudley Senanayake could ensure inter-ethnic harmony. They felt contempt and distrust for the SLFP, which they feared would turn the country into a witches' cauldron, as it eventually did. The Tamils of the north and east trusted Chelvanayakam to be their arbiter and to carry out this role wisely. The Colombo Tamils on the other hand feared his singleness of purpose.

FP MPs met from time to time at Tiruchelvam's house in Rosmead Place to plan their strategy. Some advised caution and a wait-and-see policy, allowing Senanayake to have a trial run with a minority government. The FP could sit on the opposition benches and exact concessions from Senanayake on all the Tamil issues. Others, in the belief that Senanayake was dependable, urged the exploration of every possible avenue to obtain the best terms from him. Chelvanayakam was in no haste, and chided his MPs for their premature optimism: their party would have several such opportunities in the future, he said, and this would not be their last chance. They should therefore carefully weigh the possibilities.

Outside his party and the Tamils, Chelvanayakam was visited by Father Peter Pillai, an eminent Roman Catholic educationist who had some political influence since his brother Emilianus was Bishop of Jaffna and could thus sway the influential Catholic vote in the Northern Province. Chelvanayakam eventually visited Father Pillai with his chief political lieutenant, Dr Naganathan, and told him, much to his disappointment, that Senanayake was unwilling to compromise.

The ex-Prime Minister Sir John Kotelawala met Chelvanayakam at Dr Naganathan's house, explaining that he did not represent any party but was functioning as an independent emissary. However, he did not understand the FP's position. Chelvanayakam outlined his party's immediate demands, which Kotelawala sought to water down when notes were being taken. Chelvanayakam, ever on the alert, took care to emphasise the exact position. The mission came to nothing.

The fall of the Senanayake government became evident after a

private meeting between Chelvanayakam (with Dr Naganathan) and Senanayake (with Sir Lalita Rajapakse) at the house of Sir Edward Jayatilleke, a retired Chief Justice, who also took part. Senanayake told Chelvanayakam that he had examined the FP's demands and could not make concessions on Sinhala colonisation or regional autonomy. He said he had campaigned vigorously against any accommodation with the FP on these matters. On the Tamil language he was vague, but agreed to provide relief to Tamil public servants working under the rigours of the Sinhala Only Act. On the issue of the hill country Tamils he had no answer except that he would have considered appointing Thondaman of the Ceylon Workers' Congress to Parliament had he not already appointed S. P. Vythilingam, a long-standing hill country Tamil loyalist of the UNP. Thus not one of Senanayake's answers even touched the fringes of the Tamil issue. When Chelvanayakam expressed his dismay at this, Senanayake suggested that the FP could sit in opposition, that it need not accept portfolios in his government (Chelvanayakam hastened to point out that his party was pledged not to accept ministerial portfolios until it obtained satisfaction on its demands) and that it could choose to vote against his government should it present Parliament with legislation detrimental to the Tamil interest. Chelvanayakam replied that this was what any democratic government should do. The meeting ended in some disarray⁹ but the fate of the Senanayake government was sealed.

Chelvanayakam had his reservations about the political trustworthiness of both Senanayakes, father and son. They were in the habit of sending emissaries to negotiate on their behalf, and when it came to delivering, should they be politically embarrassed, they would deny that they themselves had ever given any pledge or undertaking. During the weeks that followed the meeting at Sir Edward Jayatilleke's house, many hours were spent in meetings between Chelvanayakam and Senanayake. Neither could break the deadlock, although these meetings gave Senanayake a better understanding of the FP's position on the need to keep the demographic composition of the Tamil-speaking Northern and Eastern Provinces undisturbed. Some FP spokesmen had said that Sinhala colonists in these areas would have to be got out, but Chelvanayakam took a more moderate position. Thus in a fighting

9. This was caused by Dr Naganathan insisting that Dudley Senanayake state in writing that he had not informed the Governor-General that the FP supported his government (the Governor-General had reportedly given the excuse of FP support as the reason for calling on Senanayake to form a government). Rajapakse and Jayatilleke angrily upbraided Naganathan for not taking Senanayake at his word. On his return home, Chelvanayakam told me that he thought the performance 'disgusting'. Later Senanayake sent Stanley de Zoysa to him with a message of apology for the incident.

speech in Parliament denouncing Chelvanayakam and the FP just before the vote which he knew would bring his government down, Senanayake said that he and Chelvanayakam could easily have worked out an agreed settlement on Sinhala colonisation.

With the SLFP Chelvanayakam made headway because its emissary Felix Dias Bandaranaike and subsequently its other leaders C. P. de Silva, A. P. Jayasuriya and Maithripala Senanayake agreed that, if called upon to form a government, they would present a statement of policy to Parliament containing the provisions of the Bandaranaike-Chelvanayakam Pact of July 1957. They averred that the FP had an effective hold over them since they could be voted out of power if the statement of policy was unacceptable. A series of meetings followed between Chelvanayakam and FP MPs on one side and the SLFP leaders on the other. Chelvanayakam visited Mrs Bandaranaike, who declared that she would stand by the undertakings of her party leaders. On the basis of these pledges, the FP voted against the Senanayake government.

The unexpected happened when the Governor-General acceded to Senanayake's request for a dissolution, but not without first exploring the possibilities of a stable alternative government.¹⁰ In these discussions Chelvanayakam said that he would support an alternative SLFP-led government; also, that he and his party had an understanding with the SLFP and did not expect it to renege on its undertaking. When asked by the Governor-General whether he would give unqualified support to the alternative government to function for at least two years, he replied that his party would support an SLFP-led government not for two years but for its full term. He had thus parried the question about 'unqualified support', and the Governor-General used this as his reason for dissolving Parliament.

The question arose as to whether the FP-SLFP understanding would be binding if the SLFP were returned with an overall majority and did not have to depend on FP support. Chelvanayakam's interpretation was that it was binding, but he had not obtained clarification on this vital point. The SLFP nevertheless requested him to mobilise Tamil support for its candidates in the Sinhala provinces, and this was done through the FP's organisational network. SLFP leaders were in contact with the FP throughout the election campaign of April-July 1960.

10. For an analysis of the actions of the Governor-General during this phase, see my 'The Governor-General and the two Dissolutions of Parliament, December 5, 1959 and April 23, 1960', *Ceylon Journal of Historical and Social Studies*, vol. 2, no. 2, 1959. In an interview at the time, Dr N. M. Perera told me that the Governor-General was going through a 'Gethsemane' in his presence, asking: 'How can I appoint a *Salagama* man [C. P. de Silva; this was traditionally a caste of cinnamon-peelers] in preference to a *Goigama* [Dudley Senanayake — this was a superior caste]?'

At the election the SLFP won a clear majority and, once ensconced, not only went back on its pledges but launched deliberate anti-Tamil policies. The FP had been outwitted, but Chelvanayakam decided none the less, as a first step, to seek settlement by negotiation. The question of a civil disobedience campaign did not immediately arise because initially he expected the SLFP to honour its word.

Chelvanayakam had many meetings with Felix Dias Bandaranaike, but these brought no results. He did not receive answers to the letters he wrote to the Prime Minister, Mrs Bandaranaike, and to the other ministers with whom he had negotiated the parliamentary overthrow of the Dudley Senanayake government — C. P. de Silva, A. P. Jayasariya and Maithripala Senanayake. To make matters worse, the government announced that it would bring the Sinhala Only Act into full operation on 1 January 1961. And to add still further to the deepening crisis the Minister of Justice, Sam P. C. Fernando, presented to Parliament enacting legislation for Sinhala to be the language of the courts throughout the island. For the FP this was the last straw; it fell back on a Gandhian campaign of civil resistance. However, the task that faced the party was fraught with difficulty given its lack of financial security.

In the following years, 1961 to 1965, Chelvanayakam's leadership faced its greatest test, since he was forced to take charge of a defensive operation against a ruthless opponent with state power at its disposal. In spite of declining health, he succeeded in rallying the Tamil people and his FP behind him. He had now to offer determined resistance to the onslaught of a Sinhala chauvinism reinvigorated after the assassination of S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike (since two Buddhist monks were involved in that conspiracy, the Buddhist clergy had for a while refrained from coming to the fore as defenders of Sinhala Buddhism).

In January 1961 the FP launched a civil disobedience campaign, beginning in Jaffna town and then spreading to all the towns in the Northern and Eastern Provinces.¹¹ Once again there were those in the party who doubted whether the Tamil people were prepared for a confrontation with the Sinhala state. There was also genuine fear of a violent Sinhala reaction against Tamils in the seven Sinhala provinces. Chelvanayakam was well aware of these dangers, but he was the kind of man who pursues his goals single-mindedly, and he conceived of a struggle which would force the government's hand. In this there was no grand design or calculated strategy; that was no longer necessary since he had already achieved his strategic goal, which was the unity

11. The *Ceylon Daily News* at this period gave the day-to-day accounts of the *satyagraha*. This writer and his friend the Revd Dr Xavier Thaninayagam visited selected places in the two provinces and we were impressed by the discipline and orderliness of the campaign. I had access to Chelvanayakam and all FP MPs during our visit.

of the Tamil-speaking people. For him the objective now was to deliver on the promises he had made to them, but with the new floodtide of Sinhala chauvinism the immediate task was simply to contain it. The FP's campaign was meant to achieve this purpose. Chelvanayakam therefore decided to lead the *satyagraha* in front of the office of the government agent in Jaffna (known as the *kachcheri*), regardless of whether his party supporters joined him or not, on Monday 20 February 1961. He was seeking to mobilise opinion by means of the strength of his convictions; he felt he was giving the Tamil people the right kind of leadership in their hour of crisis and, not surprisingly, Tamils of all ages and both sexes rallied behind him overwhelmingly — this included the Tamil-speaking Muslims. There had been some criticism in the preceding months from Tamil opposition quarters that the FP had made a mistake in being unwilling to support Senanayake's minority government, but most Tamils believed that Chelvanayakam's actions were taken solely to promote their welfare.

In late January 1961 Chelvanayakam appeared in front of the Jaffna *kachcheri* and began distributing pamphlets appealing to Tamil public servants to boycott government offices and desist from working in the Sinhala language. The effect was electric. The appeal spread like wildfire, and soon thousands had gathered before the *kachcheri* and sat on the ground obstructing access to the entrances and exits. Almost all public servants joined in the protest, and work was brought to a standstill. All the FP MPs took part, and members of the public took turns to provide food for the *satyagrahis* who kept calm despite the strong-arm tactics used by the police.

Neither Chelvanayakam nor his party had seriously introduced the principles of Gandhian non-violence to the crowd in front of the *kachcheri*, but they were well aware that they had to remain passive and pacific protesters and not in any way give cause for violent reactions. Chelvanayakam's personality was largely responsible for the discipline that prevailed, such was the relationship he had established with the people he led. He himself believed in Gandhian non-violence and civil disobedience as a way of resisting an aggressor with a propensity to violence, but his approach was eclectic rather than original. He had not based his campaign on any deep study of Gandhi's teaching, but those teachings provided a moral weapon: the world would recognise the justice of the Tamil cause if the Tamil people followed the correct path. At this time Tamil crowds called Chelvanayakam 'the trousered Gandhi'.

The Jaffna *satyagraha* caught on in all the main towns of the north and east, immobilising the work of government there. The Prime Minister herself said that there was 'no government' in those provinces. Before her departure for the meeting of Commonwealth Prime Ministers in

March 1961, she appealed to the Tamil *satyagrahis* on the radio to abandon their protest.¹² Her government had planned to use force to disperse them on her return from the conference, but there was a fear that if they failed to disperse, the army would fire and a large number of people could be killed before the *satyagraha* was finally abandoned.¹³

The protest in Jaffna and its mass support from a public growing increasingly weary and frustrated with Sinhala governments were evidence of a shift towards possible violence as the alternative form of protest. Such a possibility had not occurred to Chelvanayakam, but the younger parliamentarians in his party were fully aware of the change of mood. Evidence of the potential for mass violent struggle manifested itself when young people, mostly high school students, demonstrated against the police and armed security men. In the frenzy of their protest, they pulled off their shirts and dared the army to fire at them. The absence of orderly government became complete when, as part of its campaign, the FP opened a post office for the sale of its own stamps, appointed postmen to deliver mail and assigned the position of postmaster-general to one of its senior stalwarts, S. Nadaraja (later elected a senator). The party further planned to organise land distribution after setting up a centre for this function.¹⁴ These were clear signs of the party stiffening its position. Mrs Bandaranaike overreacted, accusing the FP of challenging 'the lawfully established government of this country with a view to establishing a separate state'.¹⁵ Such a move was far from the FP's intentions. The *satyagraha* campaign's only objective had been, as Chelvanayakam later said in his presidential address to the ninth annual convention of the FP in 1964, 'to demonstrate to the world that the Tamil-speaking people were united in the defence of their language rights and in their opposition to the government's discriminatory policies'.

Chelvanayakam and his party were not geared to transform themselves into a mass movement of protest. They were gradualists who believed in the use of incremental methods of raising the temperature. On this occasion their objective was to demonstrate to the world that the Tamil people were being ruled without their consent. If they could establish this as a fact, their claims for federalism and self-determination could be vindicated if not accelerated — or so they thought. Chelvanayakam, in complete contrast to some prominent

12. The text was reproduced in all the English-language newspapers on 26 March 1961.
13. Disclosed in an interview with a leading journalist, Mrs Ranji Senanayake (a Ceylon Tamil, née Handy, wife of the senior SLFP leader Maithripala Senanayake), published in the *Sunday Observer* during this period.
14. Personal information as well as S. Ponniah, *op. cit.*
15. See my 'The Tamil Question in Ceylon', *Bulletin of the International Commission of Jurists*, no. 12, Nov. 1961, pp. 9–21.

middle-class Tamils who resigned themselves to their condition, believed that a Sinhala government could be compelled to acknowledge the justice of the Tamil cause when expressed in the language of passive resistance. He could not be easily dissuaded of this. One of his enduring characteristics was a self-perpetuating resilience; if he met with frustration, he would accept the inevitable and then conceive of alternative strategies. This attitude was partly due to his Christian faith in Providence and a just God,¹⁶ but it also owed much to his legal training, which enabled him to find ways of achieving a particular end when some routes towards it were blocked.

In early April 1961, the international community began to express misgivings at the government's handling of the *satyagraha*. Members of Mrs Bandaranaike's cabinet were themselves divided on what ought to be done in such an explosive situation. Two senior ministers, both professed members of the Church of Sri Lanka — Felix Dias Bandaranaike and Sam P.C. Fernando — urged the cabinet to remain obdurate,¹⁷ a posture which their colleagues saw as arising from anxiety to prove their genuine dedication to the Sinhala Buddhist claims. For whatever reason, Sam P.C. Fernando, the minister responsible for the immediate cause of the dispute, the (Sinhala) Language of the Courts Act, was deputed by the cabinet to hold talks with Chelvanayakam.¹⁸ But Chelvanayakam gave no quarter and the minister himself was not a conciliator, and thus the talks, which had never raised even a glimmer of hope in the Tamil community, were a failure.

In mid-April the government ordered the army to remove the *satyagrahis*, and it acted with unrestrained brutality. The FP was proscribed: all its MPs and other prominent leaders were arrested and detained at the Panagoda military camp near Colombo. Jaffna had its first baptism of Sinhala army rule, with civilians being subjected to untold humiliations by the Sinhalese soldiers. The behaviour of the army was raised in a debate in the House of Representatives by an independent Trotskyist MP, Edmund Samarakoddy, who said that a proud people were being humbled. The Leader of the House, C. P. de Silva, who had been supported by Chelvanayakam in April 1960 as an alternative Prime Minister after the defeat of Senanayake's minority government in Parliament, blandly asserted that such incidents were unavoidable when the armed forces were called in to restore order.

One of the leading Tamil personalities detained at Panagoda mili-

16. Interviews in *Nesiah file*.

17. Private information from unimpeachable sources, including Sam P.C. Fernando himself.

18. For the full details see my 'The Tamil Question in Ceylon', *loc. cit.*

tary camp was Murugeysen Tiruchelvam, QC, formerly Solicitor-General (a legal, not a political appointment) in the Bandaranaike government. When he and his brother M. Rajendra (later head of the civil service) came to Ceylon as students, their father entrusted them to the care of Chelvanayakam, who guided them in their education. There was a strong affinity and bond of affection between Tiruchelvam and Chelvanayakam. Before independence, Tiruchelvam had been a friend and associate of the Legal Secretary and later Chief Justice of Ceylon, Sir Alan Rose, and the two of them were the main draftsmen of the 1947 Ceylon constitution.¹⁹ He had also been the government's principal lawyer in civil matters while serving as a legal officer of the Crown. Thus he brought considerable added strength to the FP's high command, and was soon its leading political strategist. With his agile mind he could think several moves ahead of the Sinhala ministers. From 1960 till Tiruchelvam's death in February 1977, Chelvanayakam was advised by his one-time ward, and they often spent hours together at Chelvanayakam's house discussing their political strategy. At times, of course, the two men had differences of opinion.

At Panagoda camp Tiruchelvam met all the FP parliamentarians and other stalwarts and became informed of the party's thinking and the feelings of its important members. Because of so many FP members being held together in one place, the camp helped in the formation of a FP triumvirate comprising Chelvanayakam, Tiruchelvam and Appapillai Amirthalingam, whom Chelvanayakam usually asked to be at his side on public occasions to repeat his words when his voice began to lose its strength as the result of Parkinson's disease. Close to this circle were S. Rasamanickam and N. R. Rajavarothiam, both senior MPs and leaders of the FP in the Eastern Province; they mostly lived in their constituencies, only visiting Colombo during parliamentary sessions. Amirthalingam came to Colombo more often. Tiruchelvam lived in Colombo and so had more frequent access to Chelvanayakam. From 1961 to 1977 he was essentially the FP's *éminence grise*; since he was not a conventional politician with the popular touch, his views were filtered down by the party's leaders to ensure that its political base was kept intact.

Because of his failing health, Chelvanayakam was allowed to return home from the camp. Reliable reports had it that some sections of the government were banking on his early death, to be followed by the FP disintegrating as the bastion of Tamil resistance. But in the face of his illness, he showed great strength of will, and used to say that his ambition was to live to the same age as his mother, Harriet

19. According to Tiruchelvam, Rose said: 'You cannot trust these rascals — we had better state everything in lucid legal language [in drafting the constitution].'

Veluppillai — eight-four. His doctors advised him to try a new operation pioneered by the British surgeon, Professor F. John Gillingham of Edinburgh. After an inexplicable initial refusal, the Prime Minister gave him permission to go to London. However, he was asked to sign a pledge that he would refrain from political activities; evidently the government feared that he would whip up support for the FP among Tamil expatriates in Britain. Chelvanayakam signed. The operation was duly performed in Edinburgh, and proved successful. He then spent a few months in London with his wife recuperating. There was, perhaps unavoidably, a certain arousal of Tamil consciousness in Britain while Chelvanayakam was there. Many prominent Tamil professionals, among others, visited him and he returned to Ceylon with renewed vigour and with his voice improved.

The detention order on the FP's leading members was withdrawn in October 1961, and they then had to face the task of recouping financial losses. The lack of adequate finance and a stable bank balance was one of the FP's greatest handicaps. While the party operated a functioning network of branch organisations through its MPs — and where it did not have a MP, a leading notable such as a lawyer, a farmer, a member of a local body or a teacher — it did not have a paid-up membership. To enable the party to put up a good fight at elections, party workers would collect donations; this was also done during *satyagraha* campaigns. For the rest, members had to rely on their own resources, since there were no funds to compensate them for the loss of their normal earnings during phases in detention or involvement in campaigns. There had perforce to be a resting and recuperating period. The FP leadership could not sustain a non-stop campaign, nor were the Tamil people prepared to suffer exhaustion and make sacrifices over the long haul.

Shortly after the arrest and detention of Chelvanayakam and the other FP members, several eminent members of the Colombo Tamil community made efforts to work out by mediation a plan for district councils which would be acceptable to the two parties. In particular Manicam Saravanamuttu, a respected journalist from Malaysia, and P. Navaratnarajah, QC, a Tamil lawyer in Colombo known equally to the SLFP and FP command structures, attempted to negotiate a settlement but with no success. The government subsequently set up a committee of public servants to study the decentralising and devolutionary effects of district councils. A draft bill was in the making, but there were constant protests from Sinhala Buddhist militants against it on the grounds, once again, that it was an attempt to divide the country. In the end, in June 1964, the District Councils Bill that had been prepared by public officials for presentation to Parliament was abandoned. This was the last feeble and unconvincing attempt by the

Sirimavo Bandaranaike government to adhere to its 'understanding' of April 1960 with Chelvanayakam.

There was a short lull after the party's massive *satyagraha* campaign of February–April 1961. Tamil public servants kept up pressure for further action, but an interval was needed. Between late 1961 and 1963, FP parliamentarians were busy lobbying ministers on matters affecting their constituents. S. Rasamanickam and a few other MPs said that SLFP ministers were trying to heed some of their requests; they were particularly appreciative of Badiudin Mahmud, Minister of Education in 1960–3. It was their opinion that SLFP ministers were feeling pangs of conscience over their failure to honour the April 1960 'understanding'. Rasamanickam criticised, by contrast, the indifference of UNP ministers in their 1947–56 phase.

During 1960–5, Mrs Bandaranaike's government put through legislation nationalising schools belonging to the Catholic Church and Protestant denominations. The petroleum business was also nationalised, and towards the end of this phase, as head of a coalition consisting of her SLFP, the LSSP and the CP (Moscow), she presented a bill for the nationalisation of the Associated Newspapers of Ceylon (the Lake House Press). The FP vigorously opposed all these measures, in particular the nationalisation of schools. Chelvanayakam's view, shared by the party, was that nationalisation would result in schools in the Tamil north-east being deprived of funds for equipment by the Sinhala state; the Tamil medium in schools in the Sinhala areas would be gradually superseded, leaving Tamil students no option but to study in the Sinhala medium. Nationalisation was therefore Sinhalaisation.

The argument was similar with petroleum. The Tamils would have fewer employment opportunities in a Sinhala-dominated state sector. And there was also no doubt in Chelvanayakam's mind about the significance of nationalising Lake House Press: interference with the freedom of the press was an assault on democracy. The Marxist LSSP and CP were strong in their endorsement of nationalisation. Chelvanayakam had never empathised with the Marxists, although with the Marxist parties he had supported the formation of an alternative SLFP government in April 1960. With hindsight it can be seen that such a government would almost certainly have fallen because of its inclusion of Marxist ministers from the LSSP and the CP. The FP would have withdrawn support whenever the government moved towards implementing nationalisation policies.

The FP was therefore essentially a party of parliamentary protest using extra-parliamentary agitation at times to put pressure on governments to accede to even less than their basic demands. They claimed that by their parliamentary presence, their lobbying and their opposition they had successfully slowed down the pace of Sinhala colonisation

and implementation of the Sinhala Language Act. They had prevented as far as possible those aspects of the Sinhala language policy that worked to the detriment of Tamil public servants. However, if parliamentary opposition had not been bolstered at intervals by *satyagraha* campaigns, the FP's oppositional structure would have collapsed. In the 1960s there was no burgeoning youth movement or alternative leadership to launch out on a militant path.

On the other hand, there were ominous signs of discontent among the youth which would shift resistance away from Gandhian protest and towards armed action. Meanwhile, Chelvanayakam was the agent of the historical process between one world that was dying and another struggling to be born. However, he did not see himself as cast in a transitional role; he believed that in the end he could deliver the Tamil people from Sinhala domination.

During 1962-3 the FP, with Chelvanayakam's strong backing, organised a hill country workers' union among the plantation Tamils. The Ceylon Workers' Congress (CWC) of Sauviamoorthy Thondaman objected to the FP intervention out of fear that it would dilute the bargaining position and thus the strength of his organisation. For Chelvanayakam and his party this was an opening to fraternise with their 'hill country brethren', which in turn would give a fillip to the Tamil resistance against Sinhala chauvinism. Mrs Bandaranaike appealed publicly to Chelvanayakam to desist from activities in the plantations, but she was the last person who could have expected a willing response.

In 1964 Mrs Bandaranaike concluded the Indo-Ceylon Agreement, which came to be called the Sirima-Shastri Pact. For the FP and Chelvanayakam the arrangement to repatriate 525,000 hill country Tamils to India over a phased period of fifteen years was a major set-back; that 300,000 and their natural increase were to be granted citizenship over the same period was of little consequence. The Pact would weaken the numerical strength of the Tamils in Ceylon, and this was unquestionably a political blow. Thus while Mrs Bandaranaike was lauded by Sinhala Buddhist political forces for her sagacity in persuading the Indian Prime Minister, Lal Bahadur Shastri, to agree that India would take back such a large number of hill country Tamils, the leaders of the CWC and DWC,²⁰ Thondaman and Aziz, were

20. The 'two WCs', as S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike once sarcastically called them, started as the Ceylon Indian Congress (CIC). In the late 1950s the CIC split. The more powerful section, led by S. Thondaman, took the name Ceylon Workers' Congress (CWC). The minority section, led by Abdul Aziz, was named the Democratic Workers' Congress. Aziz, of Pakistani origin, was a sympathiser of the CP (Moscow). Both leaders dropped the appellation 'Indian' to emphasise that they were Ceylonese.

appalled. Chelvanayakam denounced the deal as a 'pact between racialists', an overreaction partly explained by his helplessness in the face of arrangements made between two sovereign states.

However, the Pact was not allowed to rest for the next twenty-five years. What was to be the future of the remaining 150,000 stateless hill country Tamils? What would become of those who opted for Indian citizenship but wished to continue in their employment or trade until retirement? Would they be forcibly repatriated? These questions were partly resolved when Chelvanayakam posed them to Dudley Senanayake at the signing of the pact between them in March 1965. During the 'National Government' of Dudley Senanayake, the most difficult problems arising from the Indo-Ceylon Agreement of 1964 were ironed out.

In 1963 Chelvanayakam launched a campaign appealing to the Tamil people to correspond with all departments of state only in their own language, with the object of compelling the state to reply to Tamil correspondents in Tamil, one of the provisions of the Tamil Language (Special Provisions) Act of 1958. Departments were hard put to it to send Tamil translations of replies in Sinhala to Tamil correspondents and there was some delay and embarrassment. However, there was no sustained pressure and the campaign petered out.

By 1964, the FP was preparing to launch a second major civil disobedience campaign despite the entry of the Trotskyist LSSP and CP (Moscow) as partners in Mrs Bandaranaike's politically exhausted SLFP government in May 1963. The Marxists had sympathised with the Tamil position, and the expectation was that conditions for Tamil public servants would improve, but nothing tangible happened and therefore the FP entrusted Chelvanayakam with sole control of a direct action campaign to be launched at any time which he considered suitable. Some preparations were in hand for such a struggle when Mrs Bandaranaike's coalition government began to disintegrate. The FP then decided to let political events take their course. As it was, Mrs Bandaranaike's coalition government was defeated in December 1964 as a result of the defection of fourteen MPs (the 'democratic element' led by C. P. de Silva) from the SLFP. A civil disobedience campaign might have dissuaded these defectors from endangering the safety of a government committed to full implementation of the Sinhala Act. The twelve FP MPs could have saved the government; according to the *Ceylon Daily News* parliamentary handbook for 1965, 'the Marxists within the Government were begging of the Federal Party to vote with the Government but all those efforts proved of no avail.' Chelvanayakam and the FP voted with the combined opposition to defeat the government on 3 December 1964. A general election was held on 22 March 1965.

The power of Chelvanayakam's personality gave the FP thirteen of the sixteen Tamil seats it contested, the other three being won by the All Ceylon Tamil Congress of G. G. Ponnambalam. In addition, the FP scored in one of the two Muslim constituencies in the Eastern Province, thus gaining a total of fourteen seats. The result was a hung Parliament, and in this situation Chelvanayakam was once again the key figure. Mrs Bandaranaike, on the advice of her Trotskyist LSSP ministers, withheld her resignation — which was followed by a great public outcry that she was not bowing to the wishes of the electorate, especially since the SLFP had secured forty-one seats to the UNP's sixty-six. In a House of 151 elected members, the FP's fourteen votes would have provided the UNP with an overall majority because that party also had the support of the five votes of the Sri Lanka Freedom Socialist Party (a breakaway splinter group from the parent SLFP), three votes from the ACTC and one vote from the MEP of Philip Gunawardene.²¹ Whoever became Prime Minister had the right to recommend six Appointed Members to Parliament.

Mrs Bandaranaike had the support of her forty-one SLFP MPs, ten from the LSSP and four from the CP, a total of fifty-five. The fourteen FP MPs would have increased her total to sixty-nine. There were six Independents who would join either of the parties forming a government so that Mrs Bandaranaike could have counted on seventy-five. The six Appointed Members would have increased her total to eighty-one. If she continued as Prime Minister, other opposition or Independent MPs would possibly have joined her to provide her with a working majority in the House. In our view Mrs Bandaranaike was right to hesitate. She could have waited, if she had wanted to, till Parliament defeated her on the Speech from the Throne, and in the mean time negotiated for the support of parties or individuals who might have been willing to join her in stabilising her government.

According to the *Ceylon Daily News* guide already cited, 'there was a delay of 40 hours before she resigned.' Meanwhile Mrs Ranji Senanayake, wife of Maithripala Senanayake the SLFP's deputy leader, tried negotiating with Tiruchelvam, the FP's strategist — who in response orchestrated the negotiations in such a way as to obtain the maximum benefit for the FP. Mrs Senanayake provided him with the details of what the SLFP government would do for the Tamils in return for FP support. Surprisingly, since she was a Tamil herself, it did not occur to her that the SLFP once ensconced would fail to deliver on its

21. When, in 1957, Philip Gunawardene was forced out of S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike's cabinet, he formed his own party and called it the MEP (*Maharaja Eksath Peramuna* — People's United Front), the same name as Bandaranaike had given to his coalition (of which his SLFP was the chief component) when he rode to power in 1956.

promises in the same way as it had done in the past. FP support would have meant, among other things, that her husband would continue as the most senior minister next to the Prime Minister. Though never a forceful personality, he had influence and was considered reliable in establishment circles, and would have been eminently acceptable as head of a government.

While stalling Mrs Senanayake, Tiruchelvam advised Chelvanayakam on the best strategy for the FP. Dudley Senanayake and Chelvanayakam met at the house of the UNP's Dr M. V. P. Peiris, who had been that party's medical adviser on the march to Kandy in protest against the Bandaranaike-Chelvanayakam Pact of July 1957. J. R. Jayewardene was also present. After the talks Senanayake agreed to Chelvanayakam's conditions, and at Jayewardene's suggestion these were committed to a document and signed by the two leaders. This, the third in the line of Sinhala-Tamil agreements since independence, was known as the Dudley Senanayake-Chelvanayakam Pact of March 1965.

Chelvanayakam had faith in Senanayake but asked him, just as he had asked C. P. de Silva in March 1960, how he could be sure that the agreement would be implemented. C. P. de Silva had said in 1960 'I make a hard bargain and I stick to it', only for Chelvanayakam to find out later that his promises had been empty. Because Dudley Senanayake had a reputation for honour and integrity, Chelvanayakam was more hopeful, especially when the Prime Minister-designate said that he had been in politics for thirty years and never gone back on his word to anyone.

J. R. Jayewardene played a useful role. As later became clear in the first volume of K. M. de Silva's *J. R. Jayewardene of Sri Lanka*,²² Senanayake had not trusted him. Jayewardene suggested that the negotiations and conclusions be committed to writing and signed by the two leaders, and this was accepted, although a deeper implication could well have been that if Senanayake had failed to honour the agreement, he would have had to resign, leaving the way clear for Jayewardene to succeed him as Prime Minister. Senanayake was an indecisive person given to mood swings, and this was not an unrealistic prediction. What he in fact hoped, as he later told Chelvanayakam, was that once the latter and his party became involved in his government, they would develop enough trust in it not to press for the implementation of the Pact.

Chelvanayakam, for his part, took the legalistic view and put his trust in contractual obligations. He thought that under the circumstances he had obtained an honourable compromise on the 'minimum

22. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1988.

demands' of his party and that with better understanding this would pave the way for the FP to secure more concessions from Senanayake's 'National Government'. His declared policy, which he stated without any inhibitions to the pro-Sinhala daily *The Sun* (published in Colombo), was one of 'a little now, more later'. The implication was that his party would not be tempted by ministerial portfolios and the patronage that went with them. The ultimate goal of a federal union remained the priority, and until it came to pass, the FP would remain apart. But on this occasion the FP decided to nominate Tiruchelvam to the portfolio of local government in Senanayake's ministry in the expectation that Tiruchelvam would draft the District Councils Bill and that Senanayake would deliver on his promises.

The Dudley Senanayake-Chelvanayakam Pact of 1965 was in certain ways more far-reaching than the Bandaranaike-Chelvanayakam Pact. The District Councils agreed to were qualified with the much-vaunted proviso, for Sinhala political consumption, that they would be under the immediate supervision of the central government; thus the stranglehold of the Sinhala bureaucracy in Colombo over the outlying districts was retained. Chelvanayakam, on the other hand, regarded this as the first step, and he was reassured by Senanayake's agreement that, for the purposes of establishing District Councils, the Northern and Eastern Provinces would be recognised as Tamil-speaking. What was of even greater importance to Chelvanayakam was that Senanayake agreed to people in these Tamil-speaking areas being given preference as allottees in colonisation schemes. If more places should become available, the overflow of hill country Tamils from the estates would be given preference for settling in the Tamil-speaking provinces. And to ensure that the two provinces were indeed the *recognised* Tamil-speaking provinces, Senanayake pledged that in them he would make Tamil a language of parallel administration with Sinhala and amend the Language of the Courts Act to enable Tamil to be used along with Sinhala in all court proceedings. Further, Chelvanayakam obtained relief for his most articulate constituency, the Tamil public servants who had failed to gain the required proficiency in Sinhala.

Senanayake refused to divulge the Pact's contents, making the subtle distinction that he had concluded the agreement before becoming Prime Minister and not after. This enabled those sections of the Sinhala press that were hostile to the UNP to have a field-day, alleging that the Prime Minister had agreed to a division of the country. In a disturbing new development, the hitherto ethnically liberal left-wing LSSP and CP (Moscow), along with the Sinhala-communist SLFP, participated in an orgy of anti-Tamil propaganda.

As for the problems of the hill country Tamils following the Indo-Ceylon Agreement of 1964 (the Sirima-Shastri Pact), Chelvanayakam

felt assured that they would be resolved. The CWC came to an understanding on these matters and Senanayake honoured these in his first two years in office. The Pact contained two provisions inimical to hill country Tamil interests. Mrs Bandaranaike had announced in November 1964 that hill country Tamils obtaining Ceylon citizenship would be placed in a separate electoral register to enable them to elect a certain number of MPs from an all-island electorate. The principle of separate electoral lists aroused strong opposition from the CWC and the FP, since it would have negated the power of the hill country Tamils to influence the outcome of elections in a number of Kandyan Sinhalese constituencies; it represented a cynical return to the communal electorates of the 1920s and earlier, which Sinhalese nationalists at the time condemned in favour of territorial constituencies. Territorially demarcated constituencies would then of course have ensured Sinhala majorities. Worse still, Mrs Bandaranaike had stated that the granting of Sri Lanka citizenship to eligible hill country Tamils would be tied to the physical repatriation from the island of those who took Indian citizenship. However, it was implied that the latter would be free to carry on with their employment until they retired, after which they would have to return to India. This was the expectation. The original agreement had provided for a ratio of 7-4 in the granting of Indian and Ceylon citizenship respectively. The interpretation of this arrangement by Mrs Bandaranaike's government was that there would be an *immediate* compulsory repatriation of hill country Tamils who took Indian citizenship. The CWC and the FP had condemned both these proposals.

However, Dudley Senanayake honoured his undertakings given to the CWC. In early 1968 Parliament enacted the Indo-Ceylon Implementation Act, removing all doubt that the objectionable provisions on which Mrs Bandaranaike had insisted would become part of the law of the land. Hill country Tamils could become Ceylon citizens whether or not those registering as Indian citizens were immediately repatriated or remained in the country until retirement age. The separate electoral roll scheme was dropped. The CWC understood from all this that the FP had its genuine interests at heart, a harbinger of the closer ties that were to be forged between the two communities in the 1970s and '80s. Throughout the government's life, the two Tamil leaders, Thondaman and Chelvanayakam, maintained a close and friendly rapport.

The question of portfolios was settled by Chelvanayakam and the party. Despite Senanayake's tempting offer of three cabinet posts, the FP determinedly kept to the pledge made at its first meeting after the general election that none of its MPs would ever accept ministerial office until their goal of federalism had been achieved. The party therefore requested that the home affairs portfolio be given to

Tiruchelvam and that he be made a senator to enable him to take office. The Ministry of Home Affairs was the key to the decentralisation and devolutionary exercise, since it embraced the *kachcheri* system (district administration), but Senanayake maintained that this portfolio had to be given to W. Dahanayake, a former prime minister (see page 90) and no longer a political force. The portfolio next closest to the district councils exercise was local government, and Tiruchelvam was appointed to it. However, R. Premadasa, a Senanayake loyalist, was assigned to him as junior minister and he consequently felt that he had always to be looking over his shoulder.²³

Tiruchelvam was unhappy as a member of the cabinet just as Thondaman was in a later phase with his inability to make progress in the UNP government of J. R. Jayewardene which he joined in 1977. Both found themselves stymied, although on certain fronts they made progress. Tiruchelvam could not persuade the Prime Minister or members of the cabinet to accede to various proposals he made relating to the problems of the Tamil people — in particular his objections to the government's nationalisation of the port of Trincomalee, which in his view implied Sinhalaisation — in this case, of a port in the Tamil region. What was more, Trincomalee had become of special significance to the FP in view of its plans to make it the capital city of the Tamil homeland and the site of the Tamil university. According to Tiruchelvam, the Prime Minister kept making the excuse that there was opposition from Sinhala chauvinists within his party and in particular from a Sinhala Buddhist bureaucratic organisation headed by the permanent secretary to the Ministry of Education, Dr Ananda Guruge. There was possibly some substance to Senanayake's fears.

During this entire period, both before and after his resignation in November 1968, Tiruchelvam kept in close touch with Chelvanayakam, visiting him often and keeping him informed of every development in the cabinet. There were times when Tiruchelvam was in despair, but Chelvanayakam counselled patience. Tiruchelvam's achievements were his framing of the Tamil Regulations under the Tamil Language (Special Provisions) Act of 1958 and his drafting of the abortive District Councils Bill of 1968, which met the requirements of central government circumscription. On the Tamil Regulations Tiruchelvam displayed remarkable legal perspicacity. He interpreted the section which stated that Tamil could be used for 'specific administrative purposes' to mean for 'all administrative purposes' in the Northern and Eastern Provinces, and logically so because Tamil would then be an administrative language in parallel with Sinhalese.

23. This was Tiruchelvam's perception, but the writer's view is that Premadasa was busy making his way up the political ladder. There is no evidence that he monitored Tiruchelvam.

In the ensuing parliamentary debate there was an uproar of protest from the SLFP and the Marxist LSSP and CP (Moscow). Felix Dias Bandaranaike suggested that the words 'Tamil *shall* be used' be changed to 'Tamil *may* be used', calculating that the latter would leave the matter to the discretion of the Sinhala communal government or public official, whereas the former would have been binding and obligatory. As the second reading debate moved to its bitter climax, J. R. Jayewardene, to reduce the temperature and effect a compromise which would bind the opposition, asked Chelvanayakam in the parliamentary lobby whether 'shall be' could be changed to 'may be' so that the matter could be amicably disposed of. As a lawyer, Chelvanayakam was obliged to remain inflexible on this point, and the Regulations were passed in their original form.

This was indeed a triumph for Tiruchelvam, a fact not readily appreciated at the time by his peers in the Tamil community. Chelvanayakam was satisfied with the outcome, and made one of his now increasingly rare statements in Parliament:

. . . The Sinhala Only Act deprived the Tamil-speaking people of their self-respect in this country. By passing these Regulations and thereby implementing the Tamil Language (Special Provisions) Act, this lost respect is restored in some measure.²⁴

However, FP leaders insisted that the Regulations were a temporary adjustment and that they would continue to strive towards their goal of parity of status for the two languages. The SLFP and its Marxist allies, the LSSP and the CP (Moscow), staged a public demonstration on the day the legislation was enacted, and issued a joint statement that these Regulations would 'undermine the Official Language and will prevent Sinhala from becoming in fact the official language throughout Ceylon'.²⁵ This was the first public intimation from the Marxist parties that they had disavowed their earlier platform of parity of status for the two languages. Thereafter they became part and parcel of the Sinhala Only movement so vigorously espoused by the SLFP.

On the District Councils Bill, Chelvanayakam and Tiruchelvam had several lengthy meetings with the Prime Minister and with the bill's most bitter opponent, G. G. Ponnambalam. Ponnambalam's opposition was believed to stem from his unwillingness to see the Federalists gain political credit, but he said that it was based on the principle that it was 'bad for Ceylon and worse for the Tamils'. He never explained this attitude. In these sessions he exploited the usual tactic of adversarial negotiators — namely, of raising questions which would prolong discussions to the point of exhausting Chelvanayakam

24. *Parliamentary Debates (House of Representatives)*, vol. 64 (1966), col. 132.

25. *Ceylon Daily News*, 5 Jan. 1966.

and Tiruchelvam. He did not succeed but the two Federalist leaders were none the less wearied by the interminable filibuster. The Prime Minister, on the other hand, was not convinced by the substance of the bill. He thought that because the two communities were 'contented' under his government, there was no need for institutional mechanisms. To Tiruchelvam it appeared that every clause had to be extracted from a Prime Minister unconvinced of its relevance as a solution to the Tamil issue. After numerous meetings an agreement was finally hammered out, and the bill was accepted by the Prime Minister and printed for circulation.

Tiruchelvam showed his habitual skill in the preparation of the bill, which allowed for as much manoeuvrability for the district councils as possible within the centralising tentacles of the Colombo bureaucracy. Clause 74 of the White Paper containing the proposals of the bill presented in June 1968 provided that 'every district council shall function under the general direction and control of the Government. The appropriate Minister may, from time to time, issue general or special directions to the Commissioner to carry out such direction.' There was space within this overall provision for the district councils to perform their day-to-day functions as permitted under the proposed act. With time, and with a government willing to make the necessary accommodations, they would have had adequate prospects of evolving into autonomous institutions, and ministerial interference could have been a rare eventuality.

However when the bill came to be presented to Parliament, Senanayake was allegedly faced with a behind-the-scenes revolt of his backbenchers. He summoned Chelvanayakam and the FP parliamentary group and explained his difficulties to them. Whether with serious intent or not, he offered to resign as Prime Minister for his failure (had his offer been accepted, J. R. Jayewardene would have been a strong candidate to succeed him). Probably Senanayake was confident that the FP would persuade him to remain in office, and in fact it did so. The FP hoped, despite its disenchantment, that other matters on their agenda would receive attention, such as the alleviation of the rigours of the Sinhala Act on Tamil public servants and the inauguration of the Tamil university at Trincomalee. The party decided that Tiruchelvam should remain as Minister of Local Government and that it would continue to give qualified support to the government of Dudley Senanayake. Tiruchelvam acknowledged in the Senate that the Prime Minister had 'tried his best to honour his promises' by introducing the District Councils Bill as had been agreed between him and the members of the Federal Party for consideration by the government parliamentary group.²⁶

26. *Parliamentary Debates*, Senate Official Report, vol. 26 (1968), col. 786.

Although Senanayake and the FP parted company gracefully, the Prime Minister made little effort thereafter to retain the party's support. He increasingly came under the pressure of Sinhala Buddhist groups. Matters came to a head when Tiruchelvam appointed a committee to look into the question of declaring Fort Frederick at Trincomalee an area sacred to the Hindus; this was where the Konesar temple sanctified by Tamil Hindus was situated. The Buddhist chief high priest of Tammankaduwa, Eastern Province, thereupon wrote to the Prime Minister objecting to the committee because the area of the temple would 'get into the hands of those who are neither Sinhalese nor Buddhists'.²⁷ The Prime Minister, feeling increasingly threatened by the mounting forces of Sinhala chauvinism, overruled Tiruchelvam's decision — an incident which the FP regarded as the last straw. Tiruchelvam resigned his portfolio in November 1968, stating in the Senate that the Prime Minister's action on the letter from the Buddhist high priest 'set at nought the unanimous wish of all Hindu religious bodies'.²⁸

Chelvanayakam (as he related to the present author) took the initial step of intimating to the Prime Minister his party's decision to withdraw its participation in the 'National Government'. Senanayake was perturbed because he was well aware that he would then be left in Parliament with less than a working majority. He asked Chelvanayakam: 'What will happen to democracy in Ceylon?' Senanayake was aware, too, of the possibility of the democratic process being curtailed and subverted if the SLFP with its Marxist allies were to return to power. Chelvanayakam himself was alive to the danger, but he expected the Prime Minister to make the adjustments to enable the FP to continue in the government.

The FP followed a policy of critical support of Senanayake's government, as an independent group, sitting on the opposition benches from April 1969 until the next general election in March 1970. There were still unfinished items on the agenda which the party expected Senanayake to deal with to its satisfaction. These related to the setting up of a full-fledged Tamil university in Trincomalee; the effective implementation of the Tamil Regulations of July 1966; the development of specified projects in the two Tamil provinces (Kankasanturai harbour, an industrial plant in Jaffna and improved road communications in the Eastern Province); and an additional year for Tamils newly entering the public service to gain proficiency in the official language. The Prime Minister laid the foundation stone in November 1969 of a harbour in Kankasanturai costing 25 million

27. Quoted in *op. cit.*, pp. 154-5.

28. *loc. cit.*, pp. 155-6.

rupees, but the other items did not materialise. FP leaders in Parliament, at their eleventh annual convention in 1969 and in their general election manifesto in 1970, charged the government with being 'discriminatory' and insensitive to Tamil demands.

Yet for all this the period of Dudley Senanayake's 'National Government', 1965-70, marked the golden years of Sinhala-Tamil reconciliation. The President of the FP, S. M. Rasamanickam, in his presidential address to the annual convention of 1969, spoke of this rewarding relationship: 'During the last four years we were able to gain some rights, if not all of what we expected, through the method of cooperation.'²⁹ FP parliamentarians for once had the opportunity of participating in a government and of benefiting from belonging to the government parliamentary group. They had endured a period of tribulation when the Bandaranaiques were in office in 1956-65, and the 1965-70 phase had been a much-needed breathing spell. There was, of course, the hope that Senanayake would be re-elected, and Chelvanayakam had decided that in this event he would conditionally support a UNP government. He said he had given up all hope of expecting any satisfaction from Mrs Bandaranaike or her colleagues.

This pacific period coincided with the respite he obtained from the advance of his disease as the result of undergoing surgery in Britain; one result was that he could sleep better. However, the beneficial effects had begun to wear off, making the earlier symptoms reappear. A new drug slowed the decline but he could not tolerate the full recommended dosage without suffering side-effects. Consequently he took less, and this resulted in slower movements and his voice becoming no more than a whisper. Still, he did not cease his active campaigning.

In all, during 1956-64, Chelvanayakam had launched and effectively prosecuted ten major campaigns against the governments of S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike and, later, Sirimavo Bandaranaike. Within that short period, he had mobilised the Tamil people to their full capacity and placed them virtually on a war footing. He had thus proved to them that he could succeed as a leader in a crisis. He had steered them against Sinhala Only, and hardly any Tamils still talked of accepting the policy of Sinhala as the only official language. He had also demonstrated to successive Sinhala governments that as the guardian of the Tamil interests he could not be moved from his determination to get what he and the Tamil people under his guidance had come to believe were their basic rights. They were now more than ever convinced that only in a protected Tamil homeland in a federal union could their identity be safeguarded and their future protected. This was even the view of the Tamil-speaking Muslims of

29. Quoted in *loc. cit.*, p. 167.

the Eastern Province. The Muslims did not support the FP, but they respected Chelvanayakam and placed their faith in his goals for protecting the rights of the Tamil linguistic groups.³⁰ Muslim leaders and MPs from Muslim majority constituencies in the Eastern Province frequently 'compared notes' with Tamil MPs from that province and expressed concern especially over the inequitable distribution of lands to Sinhala outsiders.

30. Dr M. C. M. Kaleel, the respected Muslim elder statesman, said of him after his death: 'Chelvanayakam did not fight for the Tamil cause alone . . . Whenever and wherever he found people being unjustly treated, he promptly took action to see that justice was done. For instance, in 1976 when the Muslims who gathered in the Puttalam Mosque completely unarmed were shot down by the police killing six and injuring many more, he was the only MP who promptly demanded from the Prime Minister Sirimavo Bandaranaike to appoint a commission to inquire into the incident.' *S. J. V. Chelvanayakam: A Tribute* (Colombo: Arul M. Rajendram, 1978), p. 14.

THE ESCALATION OF DEMANDS: A SEPARATE STATE

The general election of 1970 spelt the beginning of the end to any hope of a meaningful Sinhala-Tamil reconciliation within a single island state. The FP performed successfully against its rival, the ACTC, winning twelve of the nineteen seats it contested. But in the Northern Province two of its stalwarts, Dr Naganathan and Appapillai Amirthalingam, Chelvanayakam's chosen heir, were defeated. Both lost by narrow margins to ACTC candidates, and their defeat weakened the FP's debating strength in Parliament. On the other hand, the FP all but destroyed the ACTC including its leader G. G. Ponnambalam and deputy M. Sivasithamparam, both of whom were parliamentary debaters of exceptional skill.

In the Eastern Province the party's most senior leader S. M. Rasamanickam lost his seat, a severe blow. Other FP candidates also lost by small margins of only a few hundred votes. Chelvanayakam, with his weakening condition, had not visited that province as often as in the past, and his presence would undoubtedly have made a difference. All the same, his charisma still retained its hold on the party, which continued to give him its unstinted trust.

But there was a question that troubled middle-class Tamils particularly, but also no doubt other elements in Tamil society. Could the Tamil movement maintain its carefully balanced middle course if Chelvanayakam became completely incapacitated or died? There was another fear too among the political class, arising from the growing awareness that young people and their leaders were contemplating the twin strategies of armed struggle and protracted civil war. For the time being, however, the tide of violence was contained by Chelvanayakam's leadership.

Chelvanayakam wished to keep his hands on the levers of the movement, but his health gave him little opportunity to do so. Consequently, a militant youth front evolved as a powerful element. After the general election, there followed a hiatus which was filled by senior members of the party who did not have credentials in the sense of being elected parliamentarians. Tiruchelvam, who lived in Colombo, was under pressure from Colombo Tamils. He kept in close touch with Chelvanayakam, but the leader did not always agree with his advice; his drawback was that he was not in close contact with grassroots

thinking in the Tamil areas.¹ Naganathan, who also lived in Colombo, became seriously ill and had to cease being actively involved.

In the Tamil areas, Appapillai Amirthalingam took control of affairs, and was assisted by Murugesu Sivasithamparam when the latter joined with the majority of Tamil MPs to become one of the principal architects of the TUF and later the TULF. A duumvirate thus emerged. However, there were other formidable leaders in the FP's top parliamentary echelons. The strongest of these was S. Kathiravetpillai, whom sections of the youth front viewed as being the most militant and inflexible on the Tamil stance. Chelvanayakam still remained the leader in the context of this unofficial division of labour, and his presence prevented open rifts.

In the 1970 election the United Front comprising Mrs Bandaranaike's SLFP, the Trotskyist LSSP and the CP (Moscow) won 125 seats in a House of 151. This provided the Front with the unambiguous mandate it had asked for from the electorate — among other things to draw up an autochthonous constitution in place of the 'British-imposed' Soulbury constitution which had been in place since 1947-8. Chelvanayakam sensed the gathering storm in the context of the overwhelming majority secured by the Sinhala Buddhist-oriented UF. In a short statement immediately after the result in his own constituency was announced, he declared: 'Only God can help the Tamils.' This was a true reflection of his despair.

The next few years were to confirm Chelvanayakam's worst fears — not that he anticipated the great JVP youth insurrection of 1971² and the government's subsequent preoccupation with it almost to the exclusion of anything else. But his experience with the SLFP leaders confirmed his total pessimism. Furthermore, despite all the declared intentions of the Marxist leaders in the UF over the Tamil question, he doubted their reliability — and was proved right in that these so-called internationalist Marxist leaders became proponents of Sinhala chauvinism in their bid to retain power within the UF cabinet. However, Chelvanayakam's scepticism also arose from his innately

1. Tiruchelvam's Senate term ended in 1971, the year in which Mrs Bandaranaike's UF government abolished the Senate — believing that it interfered with its own legislative programmes — before enacting the Constitution of 1972.
2. The JVP (*Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna* — People's Liberation Front), an ultra-Marxist organisation of young people aged 18-25, led an insurrection against Mrs Bandaranaike's government in 1971. The government forces at first failed to suppress it, but it was later cruelly crushed. The same JVP, by then a mix of Marxism and anti-Indianism, rose against President Jayewardene's July 1987 accord with the Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. From 1987 to 1989 the government was in grave danger, but the army finally crushed the rising after capturing its leaders.

conservative attitude, which was in line with the traditionalism of the Tamil people.

In this phase he witnessed the onset of violence as a weapon of resistance by militant Tamil youth who, while they still respected him as a benevolent and understanding father-figure, nevertheless preferred to go their own way. He urged young people to renounce violence and continue with their education. However, they clearly felt that they had no alternative but to react against all the manifestations of Sinhala hegemonism which had grown out of the economic failure of successive governments and then become compounded by the combined opportunism of SLFP chauvinists and their Marxist allies. For his part Felix Dias Bandaranaike of the SLFP, an ultra right-winger, would not concede an inch of ground to the UF Marxist ministers, who were thus inhibited within the UF framework.

Mrs Bandaranaike trusted Felix Dias Bandaranaike; she had her own circle of family advisers, a Chinese wall which could not easily be penetrated. Thus the UF itself was divided and, in the context of the growing political instability, ever more unwilling to consider Tamil demands. More to the point, Felix Dias Bandaranaike and his followers, in an effort to outmanoeuvre the Marxists who took a moderate position on the Tamil question, pursued policies that were straightforwardly hostile to Tamil interests.

The decision to inaugurate a Constituent Assembly and to formulate a made-in-Sri Lanka autochthonous constitution enabled the FP to mobilise Tamil support against what was going to be a Sinhala Buddhist document. The irony was that the chief architect of the constitution was the internationally known Trotskyist, Dr Colvin R. de Silva of the LSSP, who was Minister for Constitutional Affairs. Other things being equal, he might not have countenanced some of the specifically Sinhala Buddhist features of the constitution, but by now the LSSP leaders had reconciled themselves in the sunset of their lives to abandoning the vision of world revolution and settling cosily for the three portfolios that Mrs Bandaranaike had given them. Dr de Silva was also clearly outpaced by the Sinhala Buddhist chauvinists heading the committees in charge of different aspects of the constitution.

For Chelvanayakam and the FP the most disturbing aspects of this constitution-making process was the decision to enshrine the Sinhala language as the one official language, to reduce the status of Tamil to a language requiring translation, to provide special provision for Buddhism and to do away with Section 29 of the 1947-8 constitution which had hitherto been a kind of covenant for the protection of minority rights.

Chelvanayakam was approached by Tiruchelvam on the question of

FP cooperation in the constitution-making process in return for an offer that the Bandaranaike-Chelvanayakam Pact of 1957 or a version of it would be incorporated in the new constitution. Tiruchelvam did not name his principals but it was self-evident that he was acting on approaches made to him by senior members of the UF government. He himself thought that an unusual opportunity had presented itself, but Chelvanayakam was wary. For the UF government there was now a constitutionally insoluble problem, the unwillingness of the principal minority to cooperate. The UF tried to resolve this by persuading the FP to participate, but failed.

The FP's position was and always had been that the Tamil community was entitled to the right to self-determination, that Britain's paramountcy over the Tamil nation had lapsed with the transfer of power to D. S. Senanayake in 1947-8, that the Soulbury constitution (1947-8) had been rejected by the Tamil electors at the general election of 1947, and that so long as the Tamils refused to be party to the formulation of a native home-grown constitution, they could reserve to themselves the right to self-determination and reversion to their status before Britain imposed constitutional structures on the island in 1833 which lasted till 1947-8. The argument advanced by Tamil jurists was sound in law, and thus participation by the Tamils at any point now would undermine their fundamental legal and constitutional objections. Chelvanayakam now viewed the question from another angle as well: he would not trust any undertakings given by the SLFP leadership.

The decision then was to submit a memorandum of demands which would set out the FP position on a federal structure, on language and on citizenship for the Indian Tamils. The document in its final version was poorly drafted, betraying an appalling ignorance of constitutional mechanisms.³ Tiruchelvam condemned it and C. X. Martyn, MP, who had by then severed links with the FP, was vehement in his criticism. Small wonder therefore that the Federalist document was not given the consideration it deserved. More seriously, here was a community whose leading moderate — Chelvanayakam — would soon be leaving the scene, and whose young people were on the brink of total rebellion.

Despite all this, the SLFP leaders went one better than the Bourbon courtiers; they contrived to have learned nothing from past experience and to have forgotten everything. Even with bloody revolt staring them

3. *Memorandum on the Constitution and Main Provisions: Model Constitution of the Federal Republic of Ceylon* (English version) submitted to the Steering Committee of the Constituent Assembly by the Ilankai Tamil Arasu Kadchi, Chunnakam, Jaffna, n.d.

in the face they remained apathetic; not only that, they also acted like unwitting Leninist midwives rushing to usher in the armed Tamil insurrection, bringing with it a protracted civil war. As for the SLFP's Marxist component, they lay secure in their ideological tents, spinning their sterile theories and arguing that the threatened Tamil rebellion was nothing but a bourgeois manifestation and that the underclasses and undercastes suffering discrimination were only straining at the leash to rise up in revolt against their *vellala* overlords. There was wilful misreading of the strength of ethnicity and the readiness with which the Tamils would coalesce in the face of Sinhala Buddhist hegemonism. A defensive and reactive Tamil nationalism had come to stay.

Not only was the FP memorandum rejected, but the party's MPs were not even invited to present evidence. Sinhala Buddhist hegemonism had reached a point of indifference to the party and the threatening insurgency. The FP resolved on its response and once again invited Chelvanayakam to raise the standard of civic protest. He would resign his seat and invite the government to contest him, and if he lost, only then, on the results of that contest alone, would he abandon his party's demand for the right to self-determination. On 22 June 1971 the FP general council met in Jaffna and resolved that if the party's basic resolutions on the status of the Tamil language was not discussed by the Constituent Assembly, Chelvanayakam had sole authority 'at the appropriate time to give a directive to FP members of the Constituent Assembly as to the course of action they should adopt'.⁴ Thus once again he found himself at the helm at a critical juncture, and more and more Tamils hailed him as the father-figure who would reassure them as they faced another severe crisis. Increasingly, in the years that followed, as the Tamil movement transformed itself into the Tamil United Front (TUF) and shortly thereafter into the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF), it looked to its ageing leader to provide it with meaning and content. Chelvanayakam meant what he said at a special convention of the FP held on 30 January 1972: 'I am now seventy-three years old. I am prepared to spend the rest of my life in prison.'⁵

When Bangladesh became an independent state in the spring of 1971, the repercussions were certain to be felt in the Tamil movement. Chelvanayakam was not a man to play to the gallery or toy facetiously with new ideas, yet he pondered the questions which the emergence of Bangladesh inevitably raised, namely that they should give up the federal demand and declare a Tamil state. If they did so, it meant separation. He added that this question would be submitted to the

4. *CDN*, 23 June 1971.

5. *CDN*, 4 Feb. 1972.

forthcoming Annual Convention, for it demanded 'very deep and serious thinking'.⁶ More critical and significant was his journey to Madras, the capital city of Tamil Nad, on 20 February 1972, an event which marked a turning-away by the Tamil people and the Tamil movement from Colombo.⁷ Chelvanayakam was welcomed in Madras by leaders of both DMKs and of Congress (I). On this occasion he reiterated the position that the Tamil people had been forced (by the Sinhalese) into a position 'in which only separation could save them'.⁸

Chelvanayakam declared in Madras that his party would launch a non-violent struggle. In a statement on the same subject to the *Daily Mirror* (Ceylon), he 'appealed to the [Tamil] people to eschew violence even in the face of provocation' and 'to have faith in non-violence, which alone can help us and take us to our desired goal'.⁹ Not all of his lieutenants still believed in a non-violent struggle. The youth began preparations for armed struggle, and the FP's more militant leaders despaired of performing non-violent *satyagraha* before 'a raging Sinhala bull'.

On 3 October 1972, Chelvanayakam announced in the National State Assembly his momentous decision to resign his parliamentary seat and re-contest it on the issue that the Tamil people had rejected the 1972 constitution:

'The decision will be that of the Tamil people. My policy will be that in view of the events that have taken place, the Tamil people of Ceylon should have the right to determine their future whether they are to be a subject race in Ceylon or they are to be a free people. [. . .] Let the government contest me

6. *CDN*, 4 Feb. 1972.

7. In the halcyon days of British colonial rule, Arunachalam and Ramanathan visited Madras either for religious reasons or more probably to enlarge their Tamil base. Chelvanayakam's visit was a political event of great significance, clearly marking a loss of faith in Colombo.

8. Amirthalingam mentioned to this writer that Chelvanayakam was so 'filled with horror' at the atrocities and brutal conduct of the Sri Lanka army (99% Sinhalese) that he insisted on going to Madras with him despite failing health. It was politically necessary that they should meet the leaders of the two rival DMKs, M.G. Ramachandran and M. Karunanidhi, since the two parties were more or less equipoised. Their plan was to request both leaders to put pressure on Mrs Gandhi to intervene to protect the civilian population in the Tamil areas. Neither of them intended to urge an Indian military occupation.

Mrs Gandhi was approached but with no tangible results. Both DMKs were favourably disposed at this time (c. 1972) to Chelvanayakam and the TULF. After Chelvanayakam's death (1977) and the disintegration of the TULF (1983 and after), the two DMK leaders shifted their support to Veluppillai Prabhakaran and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

9. *CDN*, 24 Feb. 1972.

10. In its issue of 15 June 1972.

on that position. If I lose, I give up my policy. If the government loses, let it not say that the Tamil people supports its policy and its constitution.¹¹

For the first time he was claiming the right of self-determination for the Tamil people, a significant shift from his earlier demand for a Tamil unit within a federated island state. And for the first time, gently and unobtrusively, he was making the same implied claim for himself as other charismatic figures have done: that they incarnate the soul of their people in themselves.

Chelvanayakam's resignation was applauded by the young in the Tamil community, who had certainly chosen the Churchillian path of 'blood, toil, tears and sweat' in preference to the Gandhian methods of civil disobedience, *ahimsa* (non-violence) and *satyagraha*, for they realised that their Sinhala Buddhist adversaries were quite unlike Britain's civilised imperial government in India. Pogroms, looting, plunder, arson and rape had been characteristic of Sinhala Buddhist reactions in the past not only from the mob but from among the state's security personnel. That Tamil insurgents were organising themselves for a war to the death was made clear in the way they greeted Chelvanayakam's resignation. The *Ceylon Daily News* reported that immediately after he announced his intention to resign at a meeting at the Jaffna esplanade, a youth placed a bloodmark on his forehead in substitution for the traditional saffron mark.¹² Chelvanayakam had said: 'If we want to live with respect in this country, we must oppose this constitution or we must live as slaves', and this had had its effect. The local *Times*¹³ reported a similar incident a week later. The Tamil Students' Council issued a pamphlet welcoming the resignation. The students visited 'each and every school in the Northern Province and distributed handbills appealing to students to boycott schools' for one day.¹⁴ Parallel with these activities were those of the two senior lieutenants, Amirthalingam and Sivasithamparam, who travelled widely to address meetings and activate Tamil people in the Northern and Eastern provinces. They appealed to their young audiences to refrain from 'any form of violence'.

The Sinhala allegation that TULF politicians appealed in their public speeches for a non-violent campaign, while in private conversation they encouraged their youth wing to resort to violent forms of protest, was unfounded and intended mainly as propaganda. For the field commanders of the Tamil movement were well aware of the consequences of sporadic and unorganised violence. The Sinhala govern-

11. *National State Assembly Debates*, vol. 2, 3 Oct. 1972, p. 731.

12. *CDN*, 23 Sept. 1972.

13. 10 Oct. 1972.

14. *CDN*, 3 Oct. 1972.

ment would be handed an excuse for perpetrating atrocities on an unarmed people. At this time international opinion sympathised with the claim of the Tamil people; they were occupying the moral high ground, in that a legitimate form of civil protest and passive resistance was being countered by violence from the Sinhala state. The youth were sceptical, but Chelvanayakam and his party men were still able to hold them in check. His personality and his careful choice of words were at this time a sufficient expression for the general feeling of despair and indignation among the Tamil youth.

But this did not continue for long. The Sinhala state kept needling the Tamil people not only by forcing Sinhala Buddhist hegemonism upon them but also by Sinhalaising the plantations — ‘nationalisation’ was the official terminology, but it really meant a patronage system operated by Sinhalese UF MPs regarding employment in the plantation sector; Sinhala applicants were preferred and the Tamils were left out because none of their MPs belonged to the government parliamentary group. This was followed by the infamous system of ‘standardisation’ of marks for students seeking admission to the universities, a scheme whereby Tamil students with better grades were excluded from the universities while Sinhalese students from the rural areas with lower marks were admitted. This is discussed in greater detail below.

The date of Chelvanayakam’s resignation from Parliament, 2 October 1972, was marked by a *hartal* (stoppage of all work) in the Tamil north-east. The Tamil people were called upon to boycott the purchase of specific government goods, so that the state’s revenues would be affected. On 2 October a large-scale civil disobedience campaign was to have been launched, but the TUF leaders decided on a postponement because of a major bank strike in Colombo. A campaign at this point would have enabled the government to divert public attention from the economic plight of bank employees.

By the time of his resignation from Parliament, Chelvanayakam had long re-established the credentials of the Ceylon Tamils with their hill country Tamil counterparts. S. Thondaman, as leader of the majority section of the hill country Tamils (the CWC), joined in the procession that welcomed Chelvanayakam to Jaffna to participate in a reception shortly after his resignation, and in a speech made clear his support and admiration for the Ceylon Tamil leader:

The upcountry [Tamils] have now realised that all Tamils in this country should come together under one leadership. Mr Chelvanayakam today is therefore the Tamil community and the Tamil community is Chelvanayakam. Our [the CWC’s] congratulations to Mr Chelvanayakam therefore mean congratulations to the Tamil community.¹⁵

15. *CDN*, 11 Oct. 1972.

The UF government treated the resignation nonchalantly. Its leaders expected that Chelvanayakam would not live long, and they hoped that after his death the movement would peter out. The government's Marxist members deliberately misled their SLFP partners by making out that they had a strong Marxist following among the Tamils of the north-east and could cope with the TUF. They even gave the SLFP leaders the impression that the candidate they would field against Chelvanayakam, V. Ponnambalam of the CP (Moscow), had a chance of victory.¹⁶ More to the point, there was a lurking fear among the Marxists that Felix Dias Bandaranaike would try to seek an understanding with Chelvanayakam, which would make their presence in the UF superfluous. Thus it was in the interests of the Marxists to stoke the fires of the SLFP-TUF war.

The government for its part was plagued with the JVP insurrection of 1971 and its aftermath. It had to address itself to the demands of the frustrated and disillusioned Sinhala youth whose expectations had risen considerably with the overwhelming majority won by the UF at the 1970 general election. The JVP members themselves had actively canvassed and campaigned for UF candidates, and now, when it came to delivering, the UF was more preoccupied with the problems of the economy and the need to negotiate with foreign governments and agencies for further aid.

The government employed three strategies to counter the JVP. While it used its foreign friends to obtain military supplies to put down the rebellion of the angry youth and the frustrated, it imagined that a carrot and stick policy would keep them at bay. Thus the first step was to nationalise all foreign-owned and later locally-owned plantations, with a certain acreage reserved for private owners. The objective was to provide land and employment for Sinhala (not Tamil) youth in the plantations at the worker level, while political involvement following state control would ensure opportunities for the party faithful, who would be given positions at the middle and higher levels. Thus nationalisation became no more than Sinhalaisation and was a major blow to Tamil hopes of employment in the state sector. The Tamil leadership vigorously opposed the legislation in Parliament, and Chelvanayakam characterised it as 'highway robbery'.¹⁷

The second strategy of the government was to design a policy of exclusion against Tamils over admission to the universities and institutes of higher learning. Examinations had hitherto been on the

16. Note: V. Ponnambalam later joined Amirthalingam and the TULF, and complained that he had been misled by the Marxists.

17. In a letter to F. John Gillingham.

basis of merit, and for a variety of reasons Tamil examinees generally fared better than their Sinhala counterparts out of proportion to their numbers. To compound matters, the Tamils obtained a disproportionate number of places in the vocational faculties such as science, engineering and medicine. As always there were accusations that Tamil examiners were overmarking the papers of Tamil students, but a group of combined Sinhalese and Tamil university faculty declared that this was untrue on the basis of all available evidence. Nevertheless the charge, once made, gained currency and of course was useful politically.

The UF government's answer was to appoint a ministerial subcommittee to look into the problem. It recommended that the standardisation scheme devised by the Sinhala-chauvinist bureaucrats of the Ministry of Education should be abolished. The bureaucrats advised that the scheme was intended to 'adjust the ethnic balance in university admissions [i.e. to have admissions proportionate to population, not merit] as a measure for correcting disparities in marking standards between different subjects and different media [to correct the alleged favouritism of Tamil examiners] and as a way to compensate for the unequal provision of facilities to different groups'.¹⁸ Chelvanayakam in a statement on 8 November 1973 condemned the new procedures and said that the system was 'bound to be a failure'. Actually the beneficiaries were the Kandyan Sinhalese and the Muslims. Whatever the arguments, as the historian C. R. de Silva remarked, the ultimate result of the system of standardisation of marks and district quotas that came into operation from 1974 was the fostering of 'considerable frustration and disappointment among Tamil youth in Jaffna, who pressed Tamil leaders to declare for a Tamil state'.¹⁹

The Tamil community felt further deprived with the decision of the Constituent Assembly to accord to Buddhism 'the foremost place . . . and accordingly it shall be the duty of the state to protect and foster Buddhism while assuring to all religions the rights granted by Sections 18 (1)(d)'. Whatever these rights, such recognition of Buddhism and assignment of special duties to the state to 'protect and foster' it reduced to nought the position of other religions. Religious conflict had not been an issue in the Sinhala state of Sri Lanka, dominated as it is by the lowest common denominator, but the insertion in the constitution of the 'foremost place' clause now reminded the Tamils, more than

18. In Chandra Richard de Silva's 'Sinhala-Tamil Ethnic Rivalry: The Background' in Robert B. Goldman and A. Jeyaratnam Wilson (eds), *From Independence to Statehood: Managing Ethnic Conflict in Five African and Asian States*, London: Pinter, 1984, p. 129.

19. *loc. cit.*, p. 121.

90 per cent of whom professed Hinduism, that they were being relegated to a secondary role.

Thus the 1972 constitution concentrated responsibility in a presidential-style Prime Minister, invested the political executive with overwhelming authority, and securely entrenched the Sinhala language and Buddhism. It was all too clear that Sri Lanka was on the way to becoming a semi-theocratic republic. To begin with this was nominal, but the reservoir of powers available for use at any time by a chauvinistic Sinhala Buddhist government was always there.

The immediate issues now centred around S. J. V. Chelvanayakam. He had resigned his seat in Parliament and challenged the government to test support for the constitution, which it had unilaterally drawn up, by contesting him at the resulting by-election. The government fought shy for more than two years, an unprecedented lapse of time, before finally deciding to nominate as its candidate V. Ponnambalam, a member of the CP (Moscow), having been persuaded by that party that he would be a match for Chelvanayakam. Ponnambalam himself was not convinced of his own claims. Chelvanayakam was, of course, not happy during the time when the government virtually exiled him from Parliament by deliberately delaying the by-election. Its excuse was that the possibility of violence made a free and fair election impossible. On 4 November 1973, a year after the seat was declared vacant, Chelvanayakam wrote to the Prime Minister assuring her that the by-election for his seat would be peaceful and that 'the government and its supporters will be completely free to support their candidate', but without avail.²⁰ The consequence was a further escalation of Tamil demands and a move to militarised patterns of behaviour in the Tamil movement. It can be argued that if its leader had been accommodated in Parliament after a normal by-election, the movement would have continued on its parliamentary course.

In a way, despite his feelings of frustration and despair, Chelvanayakam was to experience a second important phase in this, the sunset of his career. Between his resignation in October 1972 and his re-election with the largest majority ever to his constituency of Kankasanturai, many significant events occurred which changed the entire character of the Tamil movement. Mrs Bandaranaike by her policy of neglect and 'anti-Tamilism' was in the end responsible for the demand for a separate state. Up to this time Chelvanayakam had been one of the most committed proponents of an island entity which encompassed a federal state. The brutality of the Sinhala forces, coupled with Mrs Bandaranaike's resolute refusal to reply to letters from Chelvanayakam or his party's MPs, convinced him that nothing good

20. *Chelvanayakam file.*

could come from the SLFP. Chelvanayakam made his decision because he was convinced that the long-range interests of the Tamil people could not be served in any other way; he would not have done it to satisfy constituents and pressure groups or to pre-empt the enemy. Increasingly he felt convinced that the Tamil people needed the leadership of someone experienced like himself. He had built up the movement from the time when G. G. Ponnambalam left it — it was then at its nadir — to its present stage of development. He had secured virtual unanimity among the Tamil people under the aegis of the FP, and viewed this as a sacred trust, not to be frittered away in exchange for cooptive ministerial positions or other transient benefits. It was no wonder therefore that during this phase it was said (by Thondaman) that Chelvanayakam was the Tamil people and the Tamil people were Chelvanayakam.²¹ An identity of interest had developed. On 20 November 1974, when the silver jubilee of the FP was celebrated, Thondaman named Chelvanayakam '*mootharijnar*' (elder statesman) on behalf of the Tamil people. Thondaman himself scathingly denounced the 1972 constitution. In an address at the time, he warned: 'If we accept the new constitution which has deprived us of our rights we will be doomed forever in this country and future generations in the country will curse us. . . .'²²

Between Chelvanayakam's resignation in October 1972 and his by-election victory on 6 February 1975, there was a sea-change in Tamil opinion mainly precipitated by the general indifference of the UF government and Mrs Bandaranaike's personal ignorance of the consequences of ethnic conflict between communities. In May 1972, a few months before he resigned, several Tamil political groupings and trade unions met in Trincomalee and resolved to close ranks. They formed the Tamil United Front (TUF). In February the same year, they had met as an all-party conference in the northern coastal town of Valvet-tithurai and arrived at a six-point formula on language rights, regional autonomy, colonisation policies and discrimination in employment. This formula, reminiscent of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's six-point demand before the Bangladesh war of independence, was submitted as a memorandum to the Constituent Assembly. It called for the amendment of the constitution, but the UF government responded with indifference. This immediately became the pretext for the FP to begin seriously considering the establishment of an independent state. Then in 1973 the FP held its twelfth annual convention at Mallakam, close to Chelvanayakam's home town, Tellippallai. The Mallakam con-

21. *CDN*, 11 Oct. 1972.

22. *ibid.*

vention confirmed the FP's new line of thinking, namely separate statehood.

Events moved rapidly because of the strong sense of alienation among Tamil youth. In 1975 the TUF's action committee resolved at a meeting in Jaffna to change the Front's name to Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) — as in other resistance movements, the addition of the word 'liberation' connoted the idea of independence. The TULF would now have three co-leaders — Chelvanayakam, G. G. Ponnambalam and Thondaman. The last-named reserved to his organisation, the Ceylon Workers' Congress, the right to dissociate itself from the demand for a sovereign Tamil state principally because his own people, the hill country Indian Tamils, lived in pockets of territory in the central sector which were not contiguous to the proposed Tamil state.

Chelvanayakam himself was not pleased with the formation of the Front. His view was that the Tamil people had all united under the banner of the FP; it was the ACTC and G. G. Ponnambalam who had chosen to remain outside. Nevertheless the unity thus forged was psychologically valuable. Ponnambalam continued in various ways to be active in assisting the Tamil cause, and used his forensic skills in court cases involving Tamil personalities. The fact of Thondaman joining the TULF ranks was an achievement for Chelvanayakam; links had at last been re-established between the Ceylon Tamils and the hill country Tamils. Over the years he had worked hard to restore the lost confidence to the latter after a section of the ACTC supported the disfranchising legislation of 1948-9. Thondaman was an honourable leader, free from the guile and deviousness of the usual politician; whatever he might do would be for the benefit of his people, who could be sure that he would not let them down. For the first time the Tamil people, individualistic and questioning as they might be, had at last agreed to a unified leadership. Chelvanayakam's personality had prevailed.

The period between Chelvanayakam's resignation from Parliament in October 1972 and his re-election in September 1975 was marked by the most significant changes in the history of post-colonial Ceylon. The Tamils established their claim to a sovereign nation-state and Chelvanayakam became its father. But national identity was not enough: a people without territory are a diaspora. Chelvanayakam had instilled the concept of the 'traditional homeland of the Tamil people'. The claim for a homeland was not a harking back to the time, before the Portuguese conquest in 1505, when Tamil kings ruled. Tamil nationalism is a modern, post-colonial phenomenon, reactive rather than assertive, forced on an unwilling people who had hitherto been

content to be bureaucrats, members of learned professions, merchants, bankers and so on. However a self-aggrandising majority (the Sinhalese) began at this stage to claim for themselves all manner of rights supposedly denied to them during the rule of the Portuguese, Dutch and British; they were seeking, they said, to correct an imbalance. But this imbalance was due to modern phenomena, the imperfections of dependence on agricultural produce, world trade and an increasing population, bringing unemployment in its wake. Blaming Western rule and Tamil 'disproportionalism' were convenient ploys. Thus in the post-independence progress of a populist Sinhala polity, the Sinhala leadership had rapidly dried up the reservoir of Sinhala-Tamil goodwill that prevailed at the time of Britain's departure.

The 1960s, '70s and '80s consequently witnessed the consolidation of the Sinhala popular state, a state which ceased to have legitimacy because it had failed to vindicate the trust reposed by Britain in the Sinhala majority leadership at the transfer of paramountcy. It had allowed that paramountcy to lapse by decitizenising the Indian Tamil population, which formed part of that trust at the time of transfer. We use the term 'paramountcy' advisedly, rather than 'power', since Britain handed over in trust its supreme rulership over two nations, Sinhalese and Tamils, to a carefully chosen and reliable steward, D. S. Senanayake. When Senanayake broke that trust, the paramountcy he held lapsed; Ceylon ceased to be a legitimate state, reverting to a Hobbesian state of nature and merely awaiting the conclusion of a civil contract in which a 'Leviathan' acceptable to all parties to the conflict would be constructed.

The years from 1973 onwards witnessed the beginnings of armed struggle. Alfred Durayappah, the mayor of Jaffna, who had also been MP for Jaffna during the short Parliament of March-July 1960 and from 1970 a prominent SLFP organiser in the Jaffna peninsula, was assassinated. This political killing did not meet with universal abhorrence; on the contrary, many Tamils had disapproved of Durayappah's activities on behalf of the SLFP. During this phase the police arrested a number of Tamil youths on suspicion and kept them for long periods in detention where they were subjected to torture. They were to be the indispensable forward troops of the future militant Tamil insurgency.

But what really sparked off Tamil nationalist militancy to a point of no return was the 'Tragedy of January Tenth, 1974'. Tamil youth at this crucial point realised that discussions and negotiations with Sinhala Buddhist-oriented governments were a waste of time and could yield no results. During 3-10 January 1974, the fourth international conference of Tamil research studies was held in the city of Jaffna. At the public valedictory session of the conference, 'without the least

excuse, a cowardly but well planned assault was let loose, with tear gas bombs, police batons, rifle butts and other weapons'. The report of the resulting commission of inquiry headed by a retired Supreme Court judge O. L. de Kretser (a member of the Burgher community) and comprising two eminent Tamils, V. Manicavasagar (also a retired Supreme Court judge) and S. Kulendran (a former bishop of the Church of South India in Ceylon), was issued on 18 January 1974. It referred to a policeman firing at an electric cable with the result that the burning coil fell into the crowd and caused eight deaths.

Some time later, a twenty-three-year-old man called Sivakumaran tried unsuccessfully to assassinate the superintendent of police whom he believed to be responsible for the deaths, and when caught by the police he committed suicide. A year later, a statue was erected to Sivakumaran's memory a few miles outside Jaffna, and Chelvanayakam garlanded it in a well-publicised ceremony. It can therefore reasonably be asked whether Chelvanayakam empathised with violence of this kind. He had always proclaimed himself an adherent of non-violence, but an action such as the garlanding of the Sivakumaran memorial raised doubts as to where he actually stood. Could it be attributed to pressure from his party colleagues and the young people of Jaffna? Certainly this was a contributing factor, but there were others who said that at the age of seventy-seven he was too old to withstand the importunings of the angry public of Jaffna who wanted to protest against the rising tide of police aggression. He was undoubtedly horrified at Sivakumaran's assassination attempt, but he was also helpless: he recognised the callousness of the state. There seemed no way in which he could protect his people, and increasingly he turned to India for help. On the question of his age, he clearly stated his position in a speech in Batticaloa on 11 May 1975:

I am seventy-seven years old now and even in this old age I am fighting for the liberation of the Tamils because I am aware of the dangers that are lurking for the Tamil community in the Eastern Province. There is no other alternative for the Tamils to live with self-respect other than fight to the end for a Tamil Nad [i.e. a Tamil State].²³

Of course he conceived of this 'fight to the end' in non-violent terms, but he was well aware of the emerging pattern of mutual violence between the Tamil youth and the Sinhala state.

The prime necessity was to safeguard the Tamil people from the violence of the state apparatus, and so in these last years Chelvanayakam made visits to Madras to acquaint Tamil leaders there of the dangerous plight of the Tamils of Ceylon — that is, until the Sri Lanka

23. *CDN*, 12 May 1975.

government impounded his passport. Between 1975, when he returned to Parliament, and 1977, the Tamil movement reached a galloping momentum with many bombings and assassinations involving militant Tamil youths. They could have been from the youth wing of the TULF or from the burgeoning autonomous militant youth groups which came into their own in the mid-1970s. Presumably both groups coalesced at various points.

In the years after the onset of the UF government's policies underlining Sinhala majoritarianism, the Tamil people had turned their minds towards liberation and self-determination. Tamil youth understood such concepts as a meaningful step towards freedom and independence; for them it was the only way in which their life chances could be improved, and they would no longer be at the mercy of the Sinhala political class.

Their goals were ratified in the Vaddukoddai Resolution of 14 May 1976 at the first national convention of the TULF under Chelvanayakam's chairmanship. This historic pronouncement accused the Prime Minister Mrs Bandaranaike of having 'callously ignored' the TULF's 'last attempt . . . to win constitutional recognition of the Tamil nation without jeopardising the unity of the country'. The convention called on 'the Tamil nation in general and the Tamil youth in particular to come forward to throw themselves fully in the sacred fight for freedom and to flinch not till the goal of a sovereign socialist state of Tamil Eelam is reached'.

Apart from this being a collective decision of the main Ceylon Tamil components of the TULF, that is the FP and the ACTC, Chelvanayakam approved the choice of words. He was a conviction politician who never minced his words, and he was certainly also pragmatic in that he would not refuse bread if cake was not on offer. As a lawyer and a politician he knew that goals could not be attained in a single leap; he believed in the policy of 'a little now and more later'. The 'little now' could not therefore become an end in itself, although many of the comfortable Tamil bourgeoisie interpreted the 'little now' aspect of Chelvanayakam's policy — best characterised by the 'interim adjustments' he arrived at with the prime ministers, S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike in 1957 and Dudley Senanayake in 1965 — as final destinations. This was far from his own interpretation of Sinhala majoritarianism. He had come to the conclusion as early as 1958 that the Sinhala leaders were 'not big enough to rule the Tamils'.

That Chelvanayakam stood unflinchingly for a separate Tamil state was clearly enunciated in the last important statement he made in the National State Assembly, a few months before his death. Speaking on 19 November 1976 at the second reading debate of the Annual Appropriation Bill for 1977, he acknowledged to his listeners how his

federal movement had failed to achieve the objective of obtaining the 'lost rights of the Tamil-speaking people'. 'Our ancient people were wise,' he said, and he seemed to fault himself by stressing that they 'had their own kingdom', as if to say that his own FP should at the very start have confronted the proposition of a separate state. He reminded his audience of parliamentarians that the Irish had won 'their freedom . . . but after centuries of struggle' against the British (he had also often told the Tamil public how a divided Poland had become unified on two different occasions). There was a finality and a finiteness in his conclusion:

We have abandoned the demand for a federal constitution. Our movement will be all non-violent . . . We know that the Sinhalese people will one day grant our demand and that we will be able to establish a state separate from the rest of the island . . .

Whatever the comfortable Tamil middle classes residing in Colombo said, Chelvanayakam's last testament was that only a Tamil state could protect the Tamil people from repression by the Sinhala state apparatus. When asked by a journalist how the TULF would achieve its goal, Chelvanayakam replied prophetically: 'We would make such a nuisance of ourselves that they [the Sinhalese] would throw us out.'²⁴

During this last phase Chelvanayakam, together with the senior lawyers and QCs among the TULF leaders and all the Tamil members of the Colombo bar, took part in a show of Tamil solidarity by appearing in court on behalf of Appapillai Amirthalingam, still the stormy petrel of Tamil politics but also a mature and statesmanlike leader. In the last quarter of 1976, Amirthalingam was arraigned in the High Court for possessing and distributing seditious literature, namely the text of the Vaddukoddai Resolution of 14 May 1976 calling for the creation of a separate sovereign Tamil state. He was arrested on the authority of a senior police officer, although Chelvanayakam and many other TULF MPs and activists who were involved at that same time in distributing the same literature were not arrested — thus it appeared that he had been specially targeted. If found guilty, he would have received a prison sentence, thus automatically excluding him from active politics and from contesting a parliamentary seat at the

24. That he meant no less than he said regarding a sovereign state was strongly indicated by the fact that he asked his only daughter (wife of the present writer), who had just arrived from Canada, to be present in the visitors' gallery in Parliament when he made the statement. Because she could not come on the first date, he made the statement instead on another date when she could be present. Her understanding is that he saw his statement as marking a historic break with the past. The journalist referred to is Walter Schwarz of the *Guardian*.

next general election scheduled for 1977. The High Court, in an order delivered on 10 September, upheld a preliminary objection raised by the defence against the legal validity of the emergency regulations under which the charge was being brought. Amirthalingham was acquitted, but that was not the end of the affair.

The Attorney-General filed the Supreme Court in November 1976 for a revision of this order. Some of the sharpest Tamil legal minds including two of the TULF's most talented QCs, G. G. Ponnambalam and M. Tiruchelvam, argued the case before a Supreme Court of five judges. Chelvanayakam too appeared as a QC on behalf of Amirthalingham but did not actively participate. The Attorney-General in the end decided not to proceed with his application. The case against Amirthalingham was clearly politically motivated, and it was withdrawn because the government presumably realised that the judges were independent. The government also recognised its own weakness and was planning to supplicate the TULF for support for its falling majority in the 1970-7 Parliament.

That the Tamil community was striving to be peaceful, cooperative and law-abiding, even in those times when it was suffering humiliation and hardship, was expressed by G. G. Ponnambalam in an argument before the Supreme Court judges. 'There has been some loose talk about attempts to create chaos,' he said and went on:

We [the Tamils] are as much concerned as anyone else, in however elevated a position he might be, to see that this country is not brought into a state of chaos. If we are fighting every inch of ground in this case it is to establish friendship and cordiality and not to create chaos. Your Lordships have that assurance as coming from every one of us.²⁵

Thus in November 1976, with the prospect of a war fought to the finish by Tamil armed groups, Ponnambalam, a senior Tamil statesman, still hoped that his community could negotiate itself out of the impending doom. But death took away both Ponnambalam and Tiruchelvam (aged seventy-seven and sixty-nine respectively) in February 1977, and then Chelvanayakam the following month.

In early March the hard core of SLFP leaders, with support from Felix Dias Bandaranaike, were audacious enough to make approaches to the TULF to explore the possibility of support from its parliamentary group for an extension of Parliament. The bait held out was that the extension would give the SLFP government — now going through the crisis of a dwindling majority after the withdrawal of the LSSP in 1975 and the CP (Moscow) in 1976 — an opportunity to resolve the Tamil problem. The TULF leaders, including Chelvanayakam, saw

25. *CDN*, 4 Nov. 1976.

this as a dishonest proposition, but they felt that a response was necessary for 'form's sake'. They did not wish to be faulted by some members of the Tamil community for not trying every possible channel to resolve the problem peacefully. But they had no illusions, and they were not willing to take part in an exercise which would postpone the time when the voters achieved their democratic rights for a further period. However, Chelvanayakam fell ill, and the other TULF MPs suspended discussion of the SLFP's proposal. There was no time for talks to be renewed before Chelvanayakam's death.

In this last phase, Chelvanayakam's life had been becoming increasingly difficult. Financially he was not in a good situation because the state had not paid compensation for the plantations it had nationalised, and he had owned sizeable shares in two of these. Added to this, he was lonely, although he never lacked the support of his wife Emily Grace. Of his four sons two were in the United States, and only one, Samuel Chandrahasan, with his wife, was still in Colombo.²⁶ His daughter Susili, to whom he was closely attached, had left Ceylon in 1972 when her husband (the present author) took up a new professorial appointment at the University of New Brunswick. Finally, because of Parkinson's disease, he had ever more frequent falls and although he joked that these were like the falls of a small child because he made no effort to resist them, the resulting injuries caused his condition to worsen. After one heavy fall he lay unconscious and all efforts to revive him failed. He died on 27 March.

Tributes came from all sides and took many forms. Dr Kaleel's, from the Muslim community's point of view, is quoted elsewhere (pages 112n and 134n). On his irreproachable honesty Lalith Athulathmudali, Minister of Trade, said when speaking on the Vote of Condolence in Parliament on 6 September 1977: 'Samuel James Velupillai Chelvanayakam was born in Ipoh . . . Ipoh is known as the cleanest city in [Malaysia]. Perhaps it was in the fitness of things that Mr Chelvanayakam's life was marked by a cleanliness unknown in contemporary politics. . . .' As long before as 1963, Mervyn de Silva, then editor of the *Ceylon Daily News*, had written that Chelvanayakam, for all his 'physical frailties . . . is known in Jaffna as "the uncrowned king of the north"'. He also remarked: 'Chelvanayakam's antagonists will willingly testify to his integrity.' This aspect of his character received most attention in the posthumous eulogies. J. R. Jayewardene, speaking as Prime Minister on the Vote of Condolence in Parliament, said: 'I have not met anybody in my community or any other

26. At the time of writing, Chandrahasan lives in self-exile with his family in Madras, where he heads a major refugee organisation for the Protection of Tamils from Genocide, PROTEG.

community who said that Mr Chelvanayakam would let you down.' Pieter Keuneman, on behalf of the CP (Moscow), described Chelvanayakam in a press statement after his death as a man of 'personal and political integrity'.

Chelvanayakam had wanted to stay in politics till the end, and this he succeeded in doing. The movement and the TULF needed his presence. Although he was not as active physically as before and was more reticent in debate from 1975 onwards, he none the less raised important questions and made significant interventions when necessary. V. N. Navaratnam, MP, a senior vice-president of the TULF, became the Front's principal parliamentary spokesman, always however acting in consultation with Chelvanayakam. The Front's two other stalwarts, Amirthalingam and M. Sivasithamparam, had failed to win seats in the National Assembly, but they made up for this by active fieldwork in faraway northern and eastern constituencies. The Front's central structure continued to depend on Chelvanayakam for advice, and he would arbitrate if there were disputes or deadlocks.

Chelvanayakam's funeral brought a huge turnout, and many of those who filed past the bier and watched in the crowds wept openly. It was the love and respect of the Tamil people not only for a lost hero, but also for the passing of an epoch. The dominance of non-violent protest had ended. From 1977 onwards, young Tamils took seriously to the gun in politics; before, they had only done so sporadically. Thus the Tamil insurrection, which still rages with no end in sight, went into top gear. It is an irony that the goals proclaimed by the Tamil militants were the same as those espoused by Chelvanayakam.

END OF AN ERA

Chelvanayakam had believed in his cause. Although for him it was political, it was far from being a question of politics. Thus he had pursued his mission with a religious fervour. He had been a man of fixed principles, not intransigent but unswerving in pursuit of his goal. That ultimate destination had coincided with the unarticulated major premises of the Tamil people. Chelvanayakam had entered their depths and succeeded in defining the parameters of Tamil consciousness which, up to his arrival on the scene, had been struggling to express itself in meaningful and viable political language. Federalism thus became the key word. At first he was viewed as a visionary chasing a chimera, but within a few years of independence 'the word became flesh'.

How did this transformation take place? Certainly Chelvanayakam was the most unlikely candidate for the role of leader, but he proved his ability to fill it. Independence left Ceylon still the paradisaical island, the 'Arcady' cited by Sir Ivor Jennings in his BBC Reith Lectures in 1955, the 'little bit of England' as Sir Oliver Goonetilleke described it to British officials in Whitehall. Former British proconsuls such as Sir Andrew Caldecott were glowing in their optimism for the future at the time of independence. Relations between the two communities still seemed tranquil. An isolated cosmopolitan, English-educated, westernised Sinhalese-Tamil bourgeoisie provided the underpinning for the island's stable set-up.

Some in the All Ceylon Tamil Congress did not share this frame of mind. Their most vocal representative was Chelvanayakam, although at this time in both physical appearance and oratorical power he was no match for the redoubtable G. G. Ponnambalam. But sadly Ponnambalam let history pass him by, leaving him an isolated historical phenomenon. The torch passed to Chelvanayakam, whose gentle personality and simple style of speaking had not seemed to fit him for the task. But history has its surprises and out of the contradictory forces that criss-crossed the arid landscape of the Jaffna land-plains Chelvanayakam emerged, defying the natural laws of Ceylon politics. Refusing to be lured by office, he became the man of the hour.

However, there was a price to be paid. It was not usual for someone in Chelvanayakam's situation to forsake a prosperous career. The uncertainties of political life became very clear in 1952-6 when he had no seat in Parliament, but he refused to let this get him down. He not

only kept faith but renewed it. When the idyllic paradise started to collapse like a house of cards, Chelvanayakam was there as the dour guardian of 'Tamildom', to rebuild the Tamil structures in the north and east. He suffered a grievous loss when Vanniasingham, MP, died in 1959 aged forty-eight. Till then he had looked on Vanniasingham as his successor, a view shared by the Tamil people. Then a stalwart older leader, N. R. Rajavarothiam, MP for Trincomalee, died unexpectedly in November 1963. He lost yet another pillar of support in the Eastern Province — the one-time President of the Federal Party, S. M. Rasamanickam — in the early 1970s. All had been pioneers in the movement and the party.

One might ask whether he resembled any of the great modern leaders of South Asian states. He was distant like Jinnah, but unlike him, intimate with the people he led. On the other hand he evolved into a charismatic personality like Gandhi, whom people revered and wanted to touch.¹ But Chelvanayakam was *sui generis* and did not aspire to Gandhism. Gandhi's teachings certainly had their impact, not least because while numerous anglicised Sinhalese sought patronage from Britain, many Tamils were attracted by the philosophy of Gandhi, 'the great soul'. Chelvanayakam was one of them, but he never became a complete convert. For him non-violence and civil disobedience were morally acceptable as weapons, but they proved in time to be ineffective against the undisciplined violence of Sinhala Buddhist chauvinists. The latter had already long ago clashed violently with Muslim villagers in southern Ceylon in 1912 and islandwide in 1915. However, Chelvanayakam was not prepared to let his followers take the path of violence, which was anathema in his Christian worldview and counter-productive pragmatically. Chelvanayakam wanted the world to see that a peaceful, civilised and non-violent people were being subjected to harassment and discrimination by Sinhala Buddhists. Gandhism appealed to him in his campaign against G. G. Ponnambalam and his Tamil Congressites, and it also performed a moral function against the flood tide of Sinhala revivalism, swollen as it was in the political arena by chauvinistic forces during most of the years after 1956.

Among the political establishment of the time he was a novice, but freedom for his people was a fixed idea in his mind, from which he could not be distracted by prospects of ministerial office or worldly gain. He

1. Dr M. C. M. Kaleel said, in the tribute already cited: 'While he was seated many people, both men and women, came and knelt before him, and kissed his feet even though he did not encourage it. It was the honour and respect they paid to their great leader for his selfless service to the people.' This was a reference to Chelvanayakam's birthday celebrations in the year before his death.

spurned office not as a symbolic protest but because, as early as in 1947, he realised that the few coopted Tamils appointed to cabinet rank were token figures without power in a Sinhala-dominated cabinet; what they could do for their people was strictly limited. Having sufficient clarity of vision to see the path that the Sinhala Buddhist juggernaut was taking, he evolved his philosophy of language and territory being inextricably interlinked, of a Tamil consciousness or self-awareness which, within a few years, was to evolve into a *defensive* (not an aggressive) nationalism.

It is necessary to ask whether Chelvanayakam was equal to his task and whether he grew in office. It would be more correct to say that the office grew because of its occupant. He infused into it his own strong character, and made his creed of federalism the basis for reconciliation of the two peoples. That sum total was fortified by the growing acknowledgement by the Tamil people of their leader as someone to whom they could always look for guidance. How could such a person lead them into the self-destruction of an armed struggle and protracted civil war? As late as 1975, he said: 'My presence in the movement is itself a check to extremism. My methods have always been non-violent and remain so.'²

Chelvanayakam finally left the scene at just the time when these extremist forces he referred to were gaining momentum. In the last year or two of his life, he functioned as a patron of the movement, forcefully expressing his views on vital questions. But his party colleagues were increasingly associating with the militant youth elements and this was something over which he could not exercise any control because of his age and failing health. His continued presence would almost certainly have acted as a brake, but not for long. He trusted his party men, especially Amirthalingam, and did not know that they were hand-in-glove with people who were involved in violent acts and preparing for armed confrontation with the state. Chelvanayakam had fulfilled the role history had cast for him; a longer spell would have caused him great discomfort. He would have done no more than make general appeals to young people to eschew the already mounting violence of both sides — of the state and the militant Tamil youth. Doubtless he would have appealed to Mrs Gandhi and the leaders of

2. In *The Tamils of Sri Lanka*, Minority Rights Group, London, 1975. See also Dennis Austin and Aniruddha Gupta, *The Politics of Violence in India and South Asia: Is democracy an endangered species?*, London: Research Institute for the Study of Conflict and Terrorism, July/August 1990, while Sinnappah Arasaratnam's *Sri Lanka after Independence — Nationalism, Communalism and Nation Building*, Centre for South and Southeast Asian Studies, University of Madras, 1986, provides an insightful interpretation of the general historical developments.

Tamil Nad, and got a response from them, but not in the tangible form he would have been seeking.

No one could have predicted in 1947 that Chelvanayakam would emerge as leader. For all his moral convictions and his success as a lawyer he was not made of the stuff of politicians. By nature he was an impartial judge and a patient conciliator not manipulative or a schemer. Consequently he placed great trust in the Muslim MPs from the Eastern Province elected under the FP banner, but was not able to keep them within the fold. They deserted him soon after their election. He had failed to realise that they formed an autonomous group. Many of them admired his courageous leadership, but few if any were willing to remain FP MPs. Thus although the Muslim population of the Northern and Eastern Provinces came within his broad rubric of 'Tamil-speaking peoples', they developed their own identity. His emphasis on the claims of the Tamil-speaking peoples to protection of their traditional homelands attracted only limited Muslim support.

With the hill country Tamils, the relationship was stabilised on the stand Chelvanayakam took on their behalf. Although he and the FP were at first in a minority within the Ceylon Tamil community, he maintained his position on their rights throughout all the years in which he and his FP held sway. He successfully persuaded the Ceylon Tamils that the hill country Tamils were part and parcel of the island's Tamil population and that it was in their (the Ceylon Tamils') interests to swell their own ranks with their hill country brethren. The hill country political leaders acknowledged Chelvanayakam as the one political figure who had stood by them, and their organisations (the CWC and DWC) supported him, though on a limited scale, in his civil disobedience campaigns.

Thus, when presented with the responsibility, Chelvanayakam lived up to the convictions he had always held on these questions. These were not popular stances in the early phase of his political career. The Tamils were always suspicious of the Tamil-speaking Muslims, yet Chelvanayakam persuaded his colleagues to elect to the Senate a person whom he trusted, Mashoor Mowlana, to express Tamil solidarity with the Muslims. The Jaffna Tamils, especially, isolated themselves from the hill country Tamils after G. G. Ponnambalam accepted his cabinet portfolio and voted for some of the legislation directed against them; by steadfastly opposing it, Chelvanayakam lost favour with the Jaffna Tamils. It would have seemed at the time that he was backing the wrong horse (the Muslims and hill country Tamils), but persistence in this case had its rewards.

But what of the Ceylon Tamils themselves? It was evident that they preferred to have a leader like Ponnambalam whose 'man of iron'

posture and spell-binding rhetoric they fervently admired. Chelvanayakam, patriot and nationalist, plain-spoken and unassuming, warned the Tamil people of the full horror of what they were facing and about to face — the loss of their traditional territory and deprivation of their language rights. He was their prophet of doom, which not many middle-class Tamils liked during their brief honeymoon with their Sinhalese benefactors who would soon break faith with them. Meanwhile Ponnambalam, in the short span of five years as a cabinet minister, had various useful industrial projects installed in the Northern and Eastern Provinces, but there was a price to be paid for this. He had to countenance the Sinhala government's erasure of the hill country Tamils from the electoral rolls and turn a blind eye to the state-aided colonisation of the traditional homelands.

When both major Sinhala political parties opted for Sinhala as the only official language, and it was clear that Sinhala hegemony was bent on pushing the Tamils into a back seat where affairs of state were concerned, fear struck the Tamil people and they became helpless. Ponnambalam, the leader they trusted, had not only failed them but, on top of that, he had been dismissed from the cabinet by the Prime Minister Sir John Kotelawala in 1953. In such times when the air is thick with uncertainties and people do not know where to turn, they search desperately for a saviour. It was then that the Tamil people decided collectively to place their trust in Chelvanayakam and his Federal Party. That trust was fully manifested in the results of the 1956 general election and every election thereafter in the Northern and Eastern Provinces up till his death.

It was Chelvanayakam's view that contrary to the stereotyped notion that the 'Jaffna man' was capable of shrewd political judgements, he had in fact been deceived by Ponnambalam. In his view, they could be misled again in similar circumstances;³ therefore, they needed leadership that was not merely tactical but also based on firm principles — such as he had provided. The 'Jaffna man', he felt, was highly individualistic and it was far from easy for him and his party to persuade the relatively well-educated and independent-minded Ceylon Tamils to unite under the FP banner. He said that by dint of tremendous effort and with the help of dedicated colleagues he had built his party up from the ground. The Party had become a movement exactly as he had wanted it. The Tamil people were now united in their collective determination to win freedom — an aim he always felt they should preserve at all cost, since there would always be false prophets seeking to lead them away from their present collective general will.

3. View expressed personally to the present author.

It is tempting to speculate what Chelvanayakam would have done had he lived into the disaster-prone regime of President J. R. Jayewardene. Could he have staved off the calamity of 23 July 1983⁴ or won for the Tamil people the same gains he had achieved in the agreement with Dudley Senanayake in March 1965? Could the Tamil-baiters in J. R. Jayewardene's cabinet have been kept at bay? Could the President's authoritarian tendencies have been checked by the infusion of a democratic element from Chelvanayakam and his colleagues? The answer to all these questions is probably in the affirmative.

Jayewardene had been part-architect of the Dudley Senanayake-Chelvanayakam agreement of March 1965, and it is reasonable to assume that he would have agreed to the same terms. He had a good relationship with Chelvanayakam who he was certain would not embarrass him publicly. With Amirthalingam, Jayewardene had the disadvantage of a generation-gap.

But Chelvanayakam could also have become irrelevant before the unstoppable advance of the militant Tamil youth movement. There had been an incremental militarisation of Tamil society, in the Jaffna peninsula particularly but also in the other areas of the Northern and Eastern Provinces. For what else will intelligent young people do when they are eligible for university education, but are excluded on grounds of race, even though other specious reasons may be given? Even more pertinently, how could young Tamils live in peace when the Sinhala state engaged in cordon and 'search and destroy' operations against them, as it did under the Bandaranaike governments, particularly that of Sirimavo? In this desperate situation sympathy and support were extended to the Tamil militants by Mrs Indira Gandhi, and an accession of strength to the movement came from the Tamil diaspora.

In addition to militarisation, Tamil society has been affected by movements of social and sexual liberation: the non-Vellala castes have been active in the Tamil resistance, and women have also taken to the barricades and become soldiers for the cause. This has had a sharp impact on an otherwise tradition-bound society, which seemed earlier to be tightly bound by symbiotic loyalties among fellow-members of the same caste, between neighbouring villages or within a single village.

4. 'Black Monday', when thousands of members of the Tamil middle classes throughout the Sinhala areas were killed or raped, and had their houses looted by Sinhala gangs, which many suspected of being organised by forces within the Jayewardene cabinet. This pogrom marked the beginning of the Tamils fleeing for safety to foreign countries (see the author's *The Break-up of Sri Lanka: The Sinhala-Tamil Conflict*, London: Hurst, and Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1988).

The TULF and, earlier, the FP were Vellala-dominated but were generally benevolent towards the non-Vellalas (this was a bourgeois attitude not based on the radical or socialist tradition). Chelvanayakam's world was of that texture. Even if he had joined the resistance with his non-violent civil disobedience supporters, these would have had to dissolve into a system ignoring caste differences when faced by the Sinhala state's security forces. He would certainly have pleaded for Indian involvement.

Chelvanayakam had fulfilled his historic role by the time of his death. He had awakened the Tamil people from a deep slumber to an awareness of the danger lurking in the shadows. In so doing, he created a strong Tamil self-awareness which, in the course of his relatively short involvement with his people, evolved into a Tamil solidarity which refused to bend to the will of the Sinhala Buddhist state — or be an instrument of Indian foreign policy. Like Thomas Cranmer (1489–1556), the first Protestant Archbishop of Canterbury burnt at the stake in the Marian persecution, Chelvanayakam 'lit a candle which could never be put out'. That lighted candle is Ceylon Tamil nationalism.

It can reasonably be assumed that Chelvanayakam finally solved for his people what he may have been unable to resolve for himself. Almost without exception, they looked to him as a father-figure — the very element which he had so painfully lacked in his formative years. But, important as this was, he gave them much more: a sense of pride, self-assurance bordering on conceit, an ideology of defensive nationalism, and the vision of a national homeland. Until then, they had almost reconciled themselves to the role of a perpetual minority.

NOTE ON CASTE AND CLASS IN THE TAMIL COMMUNITY OF SRI LANKA

The Tamil caste system is free from the brahminical tradition, and is more akin to the Sinhalese caste structure — but only up to a point. If electoral returns are any indication, the Tamil *vellalas* (farmers) are dominant, just as the *goigamas* (farmers) are among the Sinhalese. The Tamil *karayars* (coastal people) are next in order of dominance, even if they do not at present offer any challenge to the *vellalas*. (The core of the LTTE leadership is *karayar*, but the LTTE do not observe caste distinctions.) The Sinhalese *karavas* — coastal people who are traditionally fishermen and some of whom have, over time, become rich and prosperous — are challengers to the Sinhalese *goigamas*, and indeed claim superiority over them.

Below the *vellalas* and *karayar* are a variety of other castes, some resembling the Sinhalese structure while the others have no such similarity. Until the LTTE came to the fore, the *karayar* did not play any notable part in the life of the Ceylon Tamils of the north. In the east, however, the nearest equivalent to the north's *karayar* are the fairly numerous *mukkavas*, some of whom were elected to Parliament. However, until civil strife overtook the north and east — areas where the Ceylon Tamils are dominant — the majority of representatives elected to the legislature since the introduction of the franchise had been of the Tamil *vellala* caste.

There are no clear lines of class demarcation that correspond to those of caste. On the whole, the Tamil *vellalas* have dominated government service and the professions, with the occasional member from the minority castes. However, in the commercial sector there are members of the Tamil *karayar* community who have done well in business.

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The best of Chelvanayakam is in his speeches in Parliament in 1947–52, 1956–73 and 1975–7. These carefully thought-out speeches, which he dictated to his secretary Mr C. da Silva, contain his ideas on the aims and aspirations of the Tamil people.

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