



**AUSTRALIAN TAMIL
MANAGEMENT SERVICE**

Am I Sri Lankan, Tamil or Australian?

I write in response to the Sri Lanka Guardian article '**Patriotism Isn't A One-Way Street**' by Professor Shelton Gunaratne.

Professor Gunaratne writes '*A long-time friend of mine, Gamini Gunawardena, has been circulating an appeal to Sri Lankan (presumably non-Tamil) expatriates to boost up their patriotic fervor to think of "ways and means of meeting the poor Sri Lanka lobby in the U.S., which is easily overwhelmed by the LTTE propaganda machinery." Gunawardena, a retired deputy inspector general of police, wants to jolt the expatriates "into action in this hour of need for your motherland Sri Lanka."*

Some expatriates are already doing this by writing to newspapers in their adopted countries (e.g., Australia, Britain, Canada, United States) and by donating money to their erstwhile "motherland," which has by all indications unmistakably discarded its former "children."

In my opinion, many non- Tamil expatriates have not responded to the propaganda campaign of the Tamil diaspora for the simple reason that Sri Lanka has failed to offer them a quid pro quo for performing such a voluntary service.'

Just recently I was discussing with a fellow Diaspora Tamil that the issues of our community as migrants could be more comfortably appreciated through our family structures and conflicts arising due to lack of restructure at body and mind level - when one gets married. In this instance I stated that Sri Lanka or Tamil Eelam is like our birth family and Australia is like our family through marriage. To the Jaffna Tamil or the Southern Sinhalese who have never left home, the world outside their local areas – would become higher authorities only through practice of common laws and/or if that higher authority ‘includes’ them as part of themselves. Interestingly, in the Hindu ‘Thirupavai’ songs I have with me - Ravana who was eliminated by Rama is described as ‘South Ilangai/Ceylon’ king. This shows recognition of two distinct cultures back then – centuries ago. Recognizing it is the sovereign right of an independent culture that had developed and maintained itself with little ‘external’ contribution. But expressing it needs to be within the law of the place at that time.

The discussion above centered around a wonderful gesture by a young medical graduate Dr. Ganeshapalan Senthilnathan – of Sri Lankan Tamil origin. Ganesh came home to Coogee – from Brisbane, to get the blessings of my husband and I – stating that if not for us – he did not think that he would be a doctor today. So saying, the young Australian touched our feet in the Hindu tradition of seeking blessings of elders. I have seen young Buddhists also do this with their parents. Just that week, Ganesh’s father Senthil who was taking a leading role in the funeral ceremonies of a senior Tamil Mrs. Nageswari Nadarajah, touched our feet in

public. I took it then as him making up for past differences due which my husband and I expressed our pain and even included Senthil in our complaint to the Australian Courts. But our culture saved us from losing our investment in each other in real terms and therefore in those parts of our family. As per our culture – when a junior seeks our pardon and blessings and are genuine about it – we have the duty as elders to erase the slate clean of past mistakes. Senthil has shared this cultural value with his son and hence they are now part of OUR family – with no past karma in this regard.

My heart melted for Ganesh when he touched our feet. This happens frequently when I am in Thunaivi-Vaddukoddai – but not so much in Australia. I guess that to the extent I genuinely paid my respects through that cultural path they would keep returning to me including through Australian Tamils. I have had the parallel from the children of Sinhalese friends. As a true practitioner of that culture – I believe I have the duty to override loss due to conflicts in a less structured part of the system. The quid pro quo is the higher position of respect in Eastern culture. In Western culture as we know it today the quid pro quo is Equal status. Which culture are Australian Tamils to follow as a priority? At the moment – majority migrants from Sri Lanka follow the former system at the public level. This means Equal Opportunity is a reality only when it is practiced by Australians of mainstream culture. Interestingly, Ganesh shared with us – to our delight – that his best mate in medical school is of Sinhalese origin. I put it down to higher education helping us find common interests through which we lose consciousness of lower differences. The lower our operations the more differences we see. The more lower benefits we sacrifice – the higher we rise and the higher we rise the more common we naturally become.

Professor Gunaratne states in relation to Sri Lankan Government's attitude towards expatriates '*One expatriate added the following comment to Gunwardena's circular:*

I think the crude attitude of the Sri Lankan government toward the expatriates is one of the main co-arising reasons for their lack of feeling for the "motherland."

When they visit Sri Lanka, the expatriates are treated by all and sundry as cash cows. Unless they carry SL passports, they cannot enter the ruins of the Cultural Triangle without paying sky-high admission fees charged from 'foreigners.' Any one born in SL should be able to visit these cultural treasures as a birthright without having to pay such exorbitant fees. What offends them is the intention behind this discrimination.'

This is also the case with Tamil leaders in North – starting with the University of Jaffna. Some academics said during a conference in 2010 words to the effect '*You give us the cash and we will put your name on the building*'. Until recently, Tamils traveling to and from their homeland Jaffna were also searched as if they were suspected terrorists. Every place that we believe is our home is a sacred temple/ground. This is why leaders (including President Rajapakse) are known to kiss the ground of their homeland. I have kissed the ground of Jaffna many times. It's the parallel of young ones touching our feet. We seek the blessings of the Land. There is no higher blessing than that through our birthrights.

By treating as a 'foreigner' even one such Sri Lankan who believes s/he is in homeland – the Government is negating its own ownership value of Sri Lanka. I believe that the University of New South Wales sent me to prison for exercising within the law – my belief that I was

part of the University. My contribution through my position was way above the requirements as per the structure that existed at that time. It's similar to my contributions to post-war Sri Lanka, which are way above my official positions including as a migrant coming home. The core purpose of my contribution is to replace myself in Sri Lankan society. That society through its various parts honored me through my positions – at school, workplace and within family. As a sovereign society – that society is owed that return. Some who cannot make it back there physically – including due to Sri Lankan Government's rules and practices – have the avenue to help through those they trust and beyond that by praying to God. After all it is God's system that says that we are all part of One God and that each one who believes is as good as the power being believed.

Any system that works close to this Oneness value – will function naturally to return our investments in the system. I started giving form to this belief – after the Vice Chancellor (the parallel of America in global Administration) who sent me to prison was dismissed by the Governing Council (the parallel of UN). I did what I could to record the value of my work including the gaps that were not recorded by my seniors who had the duty to assess my work – and left the rest to God. Each time I asked God why? – I was submitting the rest to God. That is the surrender that is needed to become a wholesome member of God's system. Then we would have the 'sight' to make the connection between cause and effect. Mr. Howard did not send me to prison but he failed in his democratic duty by me a believer and hence to my mind took himself to USA the wrong place to be present during 9/11 – the wrong time. These are no accidents.

When the Sri Lankan government is truly sovereign, it would also make the connections it needs to make - for itself rather than to show others. After all – by seeking to list LTTE as Terrorists at International level, with little regard for what that would do to us as a community – the Sri Lankan Government confirmed that it lacked feelings for Tamils and their sovereignty as a community. The UN is the medium through which that karma is returning and when accepted with grace – the Sri Lankan Government would become more wholesome as a global government. All of us get disciplined as we grow up. In the global structure Sri Lankan Government is a junior to countries such as the USA, Canada and the UK that are key decision makers at that level. To my knowledge Sri Lanka is yet to include in its laws the International Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination. Indeed if it did in form similar to the Australian one – many parts of the Sri Lankan Constitution would need to be repealed. Hence it must take its place as junior in global governance. If there are Sri Lankans who are truly global – the Sri Lankan Government needs to respect them above itself. That would help merger of minds and the strength of the global mind would strengthen the mind of Sri Lankan Government. At the moment – international government is like the married family of the Sri Lankan Government which is very attached to its 'birth rights' as it sees them. Birth rights come with birth responsibility for all at that place and time of birth. Respecting others' sovereignty is part of that responsibility.

Birth Relationships including citizenship by birth – give us a head-start in merging with each other. But once the cultural and/or legal relation invests and includes more in a person or place than the birth relation – the birth relation or place needs to follow the lead of that new relation. For example Tamils who believe that Australia has invested in them more than Sri Lanka - have the responsibility to list themselves as Australians where one operates as per

country structure. Culturally – if one feels supported by cultural structures more than legal structures – then one has the natural right to show the cultural identity but do so without acting in breach of the law. That is exactly what I did at the University of New South Wales – showing my Sri Lankan educational culture – and did so without acting in breach of the law. That resulted in the Police and therefore the Government acting in breach of the law – including the *Racial Discrimination Act*.

The war between the Government of Sri Lanka and the Tamil Tiger supporters is less than a cultural war. Both sides represent only a fraction of their respective communities. To the extent they claim that they represent the whole community – they lose their natural sovereignty and therefore their ability to believe.

Gajalakshmi Paramasivam 09 January 2014