PATHWAYS OF DISSERT
TAMIL NATIONALISM IN SRI LANKA
EDITED BY R. CHERAN
PATHWAYS OF DISSENT
PATHWAYS OF DISSENT
Tamil Nationalism in Sri Lanka
Edited by
R. CHERAN
## Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>List of Abbreviations</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preface</td>
<td>ix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pathways of Dissent: An Introduction to Tamil Nationalism in Sri Lanka</strong></td>
<td>xiii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R. Cheran</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Nationalism, Historiography and Archaeology in Sri Lanka</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S.K. Sitrampalam</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Towards Understanding Militant Tamil Nationalism in Sri Lanka</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ravi Vaitheespara</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Brides as Bridges? Movements, Actors, Documents and Anticipation in Constructing Tamilness</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sidharthan Maunaguru</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Configuring Spaces and Constructing Nations in Sri Lankan Tamil Literature</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chelva Kanaganayakam</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Painting the Artist’s Self: Location, Relocation and the Metamorphosis</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T. Shanaathanan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Being Tamil in a Different Way: A Feminist Critique of the Tamil Nation</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radhika Coomaraswamy and Nimanthi Perera-Rajasingham</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Pathways of Dissent

7. Making Sense of the Census in Sri Lanka: Up-country Tamils and Sri Lankan Tamil Nationalism 139
   Daniel Bass

8. The Economics of Tamil Nationalism: Evolution and Challenges 152
   V. Nithiyanandam

   Rajesh Venugopal

Appendix
   Jaffna Youth Radicalism: The 1920s and 1930s 208
   Santasilan Kadirgamar

Bibliography 241
About the Editor and Contributors 266
Index 270
List of Abbreviations

AEVS Arasaunga Eluthu Vinaignan Sangum
ANC African National Congress
CERIS Centre of Excellence for Research in Immigration and Settlement
CFTU Ceylon Federation of Trade Unions
CP Communist Party (pro-Moscow)
CWC Ceylon Workers’ Congress
DK Dravida Kazhagam [Dravidian Front]
DMK Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam [Dravidian Progressive Front]
EMLF Eelam Muslim Liberation Front
ENLF Eelam National Liberation Front
EPRLF Eelam People’s Revolutionary Liberation Front
EPZ Export Promotion Zones
EROS Eelam Revolutionary Organisation of Students
EWLF Eelam Women’s Liberation Front
FP (Tamil) Federal Party
GCSU Government Clerical Services Union
GUES General Union of Eelam Students
JSS Jathika Sevaya Sangamayat
JVP Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna [(Sinhalese) People’s Liberation Front]
LSSP Lanka Sama Samaja Party [Trotskyist]
LTTE Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
Pathways of Dissent

MDN Movement for the Defence of the Nation
NLFT National Liberation Front of Tamileelam
NMAT National Movement Against Terrorism
NSSP Nava Sama Samaja Party
PA People’s Alliance
PCTE Penal Code of Tamil Eelam
PFLT People’s Front of Liberation Tigers
PLOTE People’s Liberation Organization of Tamil Eelam
SAARC South Asian Association of Regional Co-operation
SBM Sinhala Bala Mandalaya
   [Circle of Sinhalese Force/Authority]
SLFP Sri Lanka Freedom Party
SSM Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement
TELO Tamil Eelam Liberation Organization
TESO Tamil Eelam Supporters’ Organization
   [in Tamil Nadu]
TMPP Thamil Makkal Pathukaapu Peravai
TRC Tamil Resource Center
TUF Tamil United Front
TULF Tamil United Liberation Front
UNP United National Party
USTA United Sinhala Traders Association
UTHR-J University Teachers for Human Rights-Jaffna
WTM World Tamil Movement
While sociological and political studies dealing with Sinhalese nationalism are remarkable in quality and quantity, Tamil nationalism remained an under-researched area for some time. Important studies on Tamil nationalism were available only in the Tamil language. There was a critical need to address the complexities and contours of Tamil nationalism in Sri Lanka. This volume is an important attempt in that direction.

Prominent Sinhala nationalist ideologue and popular writer Gunadasa Amerasekera often used the phrase ‘the post-1956 generation’ to describe the generation of Tamils and Sinhalese who were born and grew up after the introduction of the Official Languages Act, commonly known as the Sinhala Only Act. The segregation of that generation and the generations that followed along linguistic and ethnic lines was perhaps the most important factor in accelerating the nascent Sinhala and Tamil nationalisms. The history of Sri Lankan ethnic conflict tells a painful story.

The essays assembled in this volume address diverse issues pertaining to Tamil nationalism in Sri Lanka. This is the first time Tamil nationalism has been studied and documented from various disciplinary perspectives such as Anthropology, Sociology, History, Historiography, Political Science, Economics, Literature and Cultural Studies.

My introductory chapter traces and conceptualizes the significant political and sociological co-ordinates of Tamil nationalism from its early phase to the rise of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).
Pathways of Dissent

The introductory chapter also functions as a backdrop to the overall organization of the essays in this volume.

Vaitheespara and Kadirgamar provide a historical account of the emergence of Tamil nationalism and its complex and sometimes contradictory relationship with the Left movement in Sri Lanka while Sitrampalam meticulously details the Tamil claims from archaeological evidence and perspective. Nithiyanandam analyzes the economic factors that contributed to the consolidation of Tamil nationalism. The essay by Venugopal is somewhat complementary to Nithiyanandam’s work—raising important questions related to sovereignty and autonomy in the era of globalization.

Coomaraswamy and Rajasingham critically explore the gendered nature of Tamil nationalism and provide a concise account of the contested nature of women’s agency in the Tamil nationalist struggle. Kanaganayakam and Shanaathanan record and chronicle, for the first time, the literary and artistic expressions of Tamil nationalism over the past two decades. Bass offers a critical perspective of an important but uneasy component of Tamil nationalism: the Up-country Tamils (malaiyaka thamilar) of Sri Lanka. Sidharthan’s essay is a welcome addition dealing with the diasporic face of the Tamils.

The gestation period of this volume has been rather long. Several major events have occurred in Sri Lanka between the time this volume was conceived and the publication of it. The single most important event was the military defeat of the LTTE by the Government of Sri Lanka in May 2009 and the rise of global Tamil diaspora as a major transnational political force. While the military project of Tamil nationalism has come to a ‘bitter end’, political and transnational projects within the Tamil diaspora will undoubtedly serve as significant motors in shaping the future course of Tamil nationalism in Sri Lanka as well as in Tamil Nadu, Malaysia, Mauritius and South Africa. Various Tamil diaspora groups have held or are preparing for referenda seeking a mandate for Tamil Eelam, a significant development in this regard.

In sum, the essays contained in this volume offer a detailed and nuanced analysis of contemporary Tamil nationalism.

This volume is the result of a conference organized by the International Centre for Ethnic Studies (ICES), Colombo, titled ‘Trans/ formations: A Conference on Sri Lankan Nationalism’, with financial aid from Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation
Preface

(NORAD). This conference was a component of a project titled ‘Sri Lanka Studies Program’ initiated by the former Director of ICES, Radhika Coomaraswamy. At ICES, I would like to acknowledge the contribution and support of the past and present management, Radhika Coomaraswamy for her intellectual contribution and moral support, and P. Thambirajah, S. Varatharajan and Tharanga de Silva and the rest of the staff of ICES for their cooperation in the project.

I am also grateful to the staff at SAGE Publications for their valuable assistance in the publication of this book. I would like to acknowledge, in particular, the support and encouragement of late Tejeshwar Singh at SAGE in the early phase of this book project.

R. Cheran
Toronto, June 2009
Pathways of Dissent

An Introduction to Tamil Nationalism in Sri Lanka

R. Cheran

The conventional view of the emergence of Tamil nationalism places it against the background of burgeoning Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism. Tamil nationalism in this sense is a form of ‘defensive nationalism’ as Nithiyanandam correctly suggests: it was nothing more than a reaction to rising Sinhalese nationalism as well as a cry against impending economic annihilation by the majority community (Nithiyanandam 1987: 116). A deeper and more complete understanding of Tamil nationalism has to go beyond this defensive stance. This chapter attempts to provide a nuanced understanding of Tamil nationalism up to the 1990s.

The emergence of Sri Lankan Tamil nationalism must be linked to colonialism and the cultural, literary and religious competition between
Jaffna and Tamil Nadu. The Saiva revivalist movement among the Sri Lankan Tamils reached its peak earlier than that of the Sinhalese. Arumuga Navalar (1822–1879), the champion of this revival, was a generation senior to Anagarika Dharmapala, the Sinhala Buddhist revivalist. Navalar began working as an English teacher to the lower grades and as a Tamil teacher for the upper grades of a Wesleyan Methodist School where he had earlier completed his studies. He became an active anti-Christian and committed Saiva revivalist after he left the mission school. As a distinguished scholar and educator from Nallur, Jaffna, he spent 30 years attempting to recover and disseminate the teachings of Saiva Siddhantam (Saivite philosophy) in Jaffna and Tamil Nadu. In a typical presentation, he would explain to his audience that those who follow the Vedas, the sacred texts of Sanskritic Brahmanism, will attain merit, but those who follow the Saiva path will attain salvation (Kailasapillai 1985). He would inveigh against Brahmanic rituals and urge the people not to allow Brahmans to perform ceremonies unless they brought the rituals more into line with Saiva teachings.

Saiva Siddhantam is the Tamil school of Saivism, and Saivism in turn is a form of Hinduism distinct from Brahmanic/Sanskritic Hinduism. Brahmanism draws on the Vedas, an ancient collection of hymns, prayers and ritual descriptions, whereas Saivism draws on a different body of ancient literature, the Agamams. Saiva Siddhantam in particular is traceable to the teachings of Meikanda Thevar, a 13th century Saivist.

In 1888, N.S. Ponnampalapillai, one of Navalar’s close associates, founded the Saiva Paripalana Sabai (assembly for the management of Saivism). In the same year, the Hindu Organ/Inthu Sathanam—a bilingual Saiva weekly—was also founded in Jaffna. For Navalar, Saivism was a better form of Hinduism. However, he was not against the ‘Aryans’ or Sanskrit. According to him, Tamil and Sanskrit were two eyes of the Saiva tradition. His project was to carve out a niche for Jaffna Vellalas in the high pantheons of Hinduism. Vellalas, according to orthodox Brahmanical Hinduism, are Sudras, the lowest in the caste hierarchy. In the Jaffna social formation, the Vellalas are the dominant force and class and the Brahmans did not enjoy any power. They were mainly the employees of Vellalas and miniscule in their numbers.

After 14 years of living and working in the Methodist Christian environment, Navalar understood the missionary strategy and tactics