

A Biographical Sketch

"A little onward lend thy guiding hand
To these dark steps, a little further on."

Quoting these words of Milton, Father Thani Nayagam climbed, for the last time, the steps to my parental home in Kayts, his birthplace. The guiding hand was that of my wife Amali, herself his niece. It was the twenty fifth of August 1980, twenty three days after his sixty seventh birthday and, as it turned out later, seven days before his death. I was meeting him after four months and for the first time after he had suffered a heart attack in June. In April, Amali and I were fortunate to have been present at his last public appearance and lecture. On 27 and 28 April, he delivered the Chelvanayakam Memorial Lectures, at the Veerasingham Hall, Jaffna, to an audience overflowing with Tamilophiles, first in Tamil on the 'Characteristics of Tamil Culture', and the second in English on "Tamil Studies: Retrospect and Prospect". Little did we know then, that we were witnessing the last leap of a dying flame.

On this visit, that turned out to be his last, we witnessed the final glow of Father. Illness had enfeebled him rather early at sixty seven, and the spread of cataract had impaired his vision. But, yet, the feast of an erudite wit, the cheer of his ever optimistic spirit, the golden voice and the ringing laughter kept us all enthralled. During our conversation he mentioned the proposal of Dr James T. Rutnam and Prof. K. Indrapala to publish a selection of his writings under the auspices of the Evelyn Rutnam Institute of the Jaffna University. He said he had already written to Prof. Indrapala, thanking them both for their gracious offer and suggesting a meeting to discuss the selection for publication. But, alas, before this meeting could take place, he passed away, succumbing to his second heart attack, on 1 September 1980, at the Retreat House in Pandateruppu.

The meeting to discuss the publication of his selected works eventually took place on 26 October 1980 at Prof. Indrapala's house. Besides Prof. Indrapala and Dr James T. Rutnam, Prof. K. Kailasapathy and I were present. And we decided to publish a Volume of Tributes to coincide with the holding of the Fifth International Conference—Seminar of Tamil Studies in Madurai, in January 1981, as this was to be the first major event in the seventeen year old history of the International Association of Tamil Research, that was to take place without the "commanding presence" of Thani Nayagam, who together with Prof. Kamil Zvelebil and Prof. V. I. Subramoniam had constituted the triumvirate of the IATR for several years from its inception.

Prof. Kailasapathy proposed for the volume, the title "Tamilaram" or a garland of flowers, to the memory of a man who was fond of saying and recalling that "The Tamils said it all with flowers".

Thani Nayagam's contributions to scholarship and society, to Tamilology and Tamilliana, are likely to stand the test of time and be subjected to critical assessment by future historians of Tamil Studies and Tamilian nationalism. But only a complete and coherent account of Thani Nayagam's life and work can depict in full the versatility of the man, his breadth of outlook and the catholicity of interests, the remarkable blend of his clerical scholarship and secular humanism, his fierce Tamilian nationalism combined with a commitment to linguistic and cultural pluralism, his philological erudition that did not extinguish an enthusiasm for poetry and archaeology, his organisational capabilities and sensitivity to social questions. "Tamilaram" provides neither a critical assessment of Thani Nayagam's work nor a complete biography; it is only a floral tribute by Thani Nayagam's colleagues and friends who were associated with him in his life, in the world of learning, or in the movements that he spearheaded. This biographical sketch serves as an introduction throwing light particularly on Thani Nayagam's early life, the early years of his priesthood and the decade of sojourn in India until the nineteen fifties.



Xavier Nicholas Stanislaus – later known as Xavier Stanislaus Thani Nayagam, was born in Kayts, on 2 August 1913, the first child of his parents, Naganathan Stanislaus and Cecilia Bastiampillai. He chose the name 'Thani Nayagam' — the paternal ancestral name, after being ordained priest. The name, having served so well this catholic ambassador of Tamil culture, now stands immortalized in the history of the Tamil people and Tamil Studies.

Thani Nayaagm received his primary and secondary education at St. Patrick's College, Jaffna, an old missionary institution, founded in 1850 and named after the missionary Saint of Ireland. As a school boy, he has been remembered for his precocity and his outstanding school record. With the untimely loss of his mother, when he was only twelve years old, the school became his home, and in its inspiring missionary atmosphere, this youthful pupil grew up to become a man of general aspirations and ultimately to answer the call within him, to dedicate his life to the service of humanity, in the sphere of education, through the Priesthood of Christ.

The roots of his Tamil scholarship cannot, however, be traced to the classrooms of St. Patrick's College. At school he would have been the not so unwilling victim of a completely colonial system of education designed to make the students — in the celebrated words of Macaulay — "English in taste, in opinion, in morals and in intellect." The teaching of Tamil was neglected while excellent facilities were provided for learning English language and literature. Thani Nayagam exploited these in the most exemplary manner and developed admirable fluency in the alien tongue. The school records show that he was a regular prizeman and a gold medalist in elocution. He was also reputed to be a voracious reader and his inclinations led him not to football and cricket but to writing and speaking. He began writing to the school magazine, *The Bottled Sunshine* and soon became its editor.

It was after completing his secondary education that he decided to join the priesthood. His was a late vocation, and he would often say, "I was not made a priest, but became one." He has recalled that Tolstoy's *Resurrection* which he read at the age of fifteen made a profound impact on him. He was also moved by an anonymous English quotation that he had come across in the school magazine:

"I shall pass through this world but once. If therefore, there be any good thing I can do, or any kindness I can show to any fellow creature, let me do it now. Let me not defer it, nor neglect it, for I shall never pass this way again."

Beginning the long trek to priesthood, he entered St. Bernard's Seminary in Colombo, in 1931. Here too he proved his mettle as an outstanding student and excelled in oratorical and literary activities. He was a frequent contributor to the Catholic English newspaper, the "Catholic Messenger", and a sought after speaker at the Seminary's Literary Union sessions. After completing his studies in Colombo, he gained admission to the prestigious Collegio de Propaganda Fide in Rome, to continue his ecclesiastical studies. He was the first Ceylon Tamil to be admitted to this institution founded centuries earlier to impart ecclesiastical training to young seminarians selected from every part of the world.

But about this time, and before he could leave for Rome, he had to face an unexpected setback. Thani Nayagam's Bishop, Dr Guyomar, the then Bishop of Jaffna, chose to decline approval for the young seminarian to continue in his vocation. This was a severe trial to the unsuspecting and inexperienced seminarian who was, however, fortunate to receive the counsel and the practical support of the elder priests in the diocese, particularly Fathers Charles S. Mathew, T.M.F. Long, K. Sebastian and S. Benjamin. As though in answer to the prayers of the anxious seminarian, Mar Ivanios, the colourful Syro Malankara Bishop from South India came to his rescue. On an earlier visit to the island the latter had been so impressed by the exceptionally talented youth preparing for the tonsure, that he readily offered to draw Thani Nayagam into his diocese and send him to Rome under his jurisdiction. Thus at the age of nineteen, Thani Nayagam set out by sea to Europe, Italy and Rome.

He spent five years at the Propaganda College in Rome, receiving his Minor Orders, his Subdiaconate, and Diaconate. He was finally ordained priest on 19 March 1938 and celebrated his first Mass in the catacombs of St Cecilia.

During the five years at the Propaganda College, Thani Nayagam perfected his knowledge of classical and modern European languages and he studied European Art and Archaeology. His doctoral thesis was the "outcome of a love for the catacombs and the history of the heroes and heroines buried in the underground vaults and corridors of Rome". The thesis later published

as a book titled *The Carthaginian Clergy* was a study of the early Church pertaining to the life and times of St Cyprian, his episcopate and his clergy during the period 248-258 AD. This study of the history of the early church, the history of the early missionaries "sowing their evangelical seeds in hitherto unfamiliar fields", enabled Thani Nayagam to realize the importance of "making the Church incarnate" in the culture and civilization of the people who were being introduced to the new Faith. In South India itself, the Italian Jesuits, Robert de Nobili (1577-1656) and Constantinus Beschi (1680-1747) had blazed the missionary trail by their pioneering efforts, centuries ago. But they had not been followed by their successors. Naturally, Thani Nayagam grew desirous of familiarizing himself with the language and literature, the history and culture of the Tamil people in order to make his contribution to the propagation of the Faith in India and Sri Lanka. He took the first step and founded in Rome the Veeramamunivar (Beschi) Society to promote interest in Tamil among the few Tamilian students then living in Rome.

Like Beschi, Thani Nayagam set off from Italy, as a young Catholic Priest, to perform his ministry in South India. Although a Tamilian, Thani Nayagam was no less a stranger than Beschi to the Tamilian literary traditions and to the values of Tamil culture. Like Beschi, he too attained profundity in Tamil letters during his sojourn in South India. But, unlike Beschi, the reputed apostle, Thani Nayagam would be remembered by many not so much as the sower of evangelical seeds in the Tamil world, but as the ambassador of Tamil culture and literature in the secular non-Tamil world. The story of his ministry and the manner of his arrival on the Tamil literary and cultural scene are recalled here briefly.

He began his ministry among the Syrio Malankara Catholics under Bishop Mar Ivanios. But as one trained in Latin rites and being one with great enthusiasm for the Latin liturgy, he found it uncongenial to work in a congregation that followed the Syrian rites and liturgical traditions. Besides Malabar was not the seat of Tamilian culture or civilization. To escape from the impasse, as it were, he took the rash step of quitting the diocese without the authority of the Bishop, only to find himself in a worse plight — abandoned and without license in any diocese in India or in Sri Lanka. He then took the only way out before him — the path to Rome, where, fortunately for him, he was able to obtain the assistance of Mgr G. Belvederi of the Archaeological Institute and Professor F. Callaey of the Propaganda College. They arranged for him to move into the diocese of Tuticorin (in South India) under the episcopate of the amiable Bishop Francis Tiburtius Roche. The latter took paternal care of Thani Nayagam and gave him encouragement and support to pursue his Tamil studies. What is more, Bishop Roche, before his retirement, gave Thani Nayagam the indult, which enabled the latter to participate freely in academic and pedagogic pursuits and social movements in the secular world. Without this indult he might very well have been reduced to be an unheard of victim of episcopal banishment. All the same, his vocation was permanent and his mission both successful

and pathbreaking. For, in his life and work as priest, patriot, scholar and ecumenicist, Thani Nayagam had anticipated the many changes in the Catholic Church after the Second Vatican Council.

Thani Nayagam commenced his career in Tuticorin, as a teacher at St. Theresa's High School in Vadakkankulam. He taught English and History while receiving tuition in Tamil from a Tamil Pundit. He spent five years at St. Theresa's High School. During this period he edited and published a Tamil Magazine, *Siru Malar*, for students besides contributing frequently to the *New Leader*, a Catholic weekly published from Madras.

In 1945, he entered the Annamalai University for a post-graduate course in Tamil language and literature. He was graciously welcomed by that doyen of Tamil scholarship, Prof. T. P. Meenakshisundaram. The Chancellor, Sir Rajah Muthiah of Chettinad, arranged for the priest alumnus to stay in the University Guest House. Thani Nayagam became a close friend of the Vice Chancellor, Prof. M. Ruthnaswamy and his family. Prof. Ruthnaswamy, the distinguished scholar, educationist and statesman, was a devout Catholic and used to be a willing acolyte to his student whenever the latter was celebrating Mass.

Clerical seclusion did not prevent Thani Nayagam from studying, understanding and appreciating Hindu philosophy and Hindu religious poetry. His Christian humanism mingled with the highest attributes of Tamil and Hindu culture and he became the classic embodiment of a harmonious confluence of the two different cultural traditions. In 1947, he completed his Master of Arts degree. Two years later he obtained the Master of Literature degree, for his thesis relating to the study of nature in ancient Tamil poetry. This was published as a book, *Nature in Ancient Tamil Poetry: Concept and Interpretation*, in 1953. Two more revised and modified editions appeared subsequently, first in 1963, titled *Nature Poetry in Tamil — The Classical Period*, and again in 1966, titled *Landscape and Poetry: a Study of Nature in Classical Tamil Poetry*. Reviewing the last edition, Prof. Kamil Zvelebil wrote in the *Indo-Iranian Journal*, ".....the book surpasses in many respects everything that has been written so far on ancient poetry of the Tamils".

Immediately after leaving Annamalai, Thani Nayagam founded in Tuticorin, the Tamil Literature Society (TLS). The Society, modelled on the Christian Literature Society of Madras, was intended to promote the publication of Tamil Catholic literary works. As the founder director of the Society, he undertook in 1950 his first major lecture tour abroad visiting the United States of America, South American countries and Japan. His sermons and lectures captivated the American congregations and audiences, who hailed him as "an outstanding promoter of the apostolate of thought". As a souvenir to mark his American tour, an American edition of *The Carthaginian Clergy* was published. The American Catholic writers predicted a great future for his movement to make the "Church reincarnate in India", which, they envisaged, would affect methods of evangelization in the Orient, and open new vistas of thought to all those interested in World Christianity.

On the academic and somewhat secular side of the American tour, he made contacts with universities, institutions, scholars and persons of general culture who showed great interest in the study and understanding of Tamil literature and culture. The absence of "some Review in English", through the medium of which the subjects of Tamil literature and Tamil culture could reach the non-Tamil world, was strongly felt. In February 1952, Thani Nayagam began the publication of the Quarterly Review, *Tamil Culture*, through the Tamil Literature Society of Tuticorin. The first number left the press, to quote the words of Thani Nayagam from his inaugural editorial,

"with a mission to perform, and with the conviction that it must meet a long-felt want."

The story of the fulfilment of that mission would also be the history of Tamil Studies during the two decades that followed. What soon became clear was that there was more than a mere academic dimension to Thani Nayagam's involvement in Tamil Studies. Already at Annamalai he had experienced the impact of the Indian independence movement and the parallel revivalist movements in the fields of literature, culture and religion. The effects of this experience now began to manifest themselves in his public life and in his contributions to Tamil Studies, giving them a social and a political dimension as well.



In 1952, Thani Nayagam left the diocese of Tuticorin, returned to the land of his birth and joined the then University of Ceylon as a lecturer in the Department of Education.

For the newly independent island country of Sri Lanka, the fifties dawned behind a facade of prosperity and stability, and the country was hailed as "an island without problems". But the early signs of prosperity and stability soon disappeared; the nation began plummeting through a period of social and political upheavals, economic crises and even communal pogroms; and by the end of the decade the country was described as "Ceylon: a Divided Nation". Of the many problems that have beset the country since then, nothing has been more serious or urgent than the continued deterioration in the relationship between the Sinhala and the Tamil nationality groups. The main issue of controversy during the mid-fifties was the "Sinhala Only" language policy of the government, notwithstanding vehement opposition by the Tamil speaking minorities. This was the phase of the emergence of Tamil nationalism as the inevitable response to the exclusive nationalism of the majority group. There was a parallel growth of Tamil nationalism among the South Indian Tamils, on account of similar causal factors and almost during the same period. Thani Nayagam was "right in the vortex of this Tamil nationalism", according to Prof. A. J. Wilson, a close friend of Thani Nayagam for over twenty five years.

But Thani Nayagam's espousal of the cause of Tamil language and culture was never in conflict with his general world view, his humanism, and his commitment to linguistic and cultural pluralism. He was the pleader for the preservation and fostering of **national** cultures within the larger **Nation**. By no means a chauvinist, Thani Nayagam never argued the case for Tamil nationalism retrogressively on the basis of established myths and revived memories of feudal kingdoms, and always castigated tendentious portrayals of past events as "dangers of history". His wide knowledge of the problems of minorities in several countries enabled him to take a liberal and progressive approach to the solution of nationality problems in his own country.

The famous lecture that he delivered on 2 August 1955 on *Tamil Culture: Its Past, Present and Future with Special Reference to Ceylon* (later published in *Tamil Culture*, and as a pamphlet), the collection of his articles published as *Language and Liberty in Ceylon*, his paper on *Regional Nationalism in Twentieth Century Tamil Literature* and the *Chelvanayakam Memorial Lectures* that he delivered in April 1980, will always be referred to by future writers on Tamil nationalism. These publications do not constitute an exposition or an analysis of all the specificities of the national question involving the Tamil speaking people. But they enshrine the committed views of a dedicated, but enlightened Tamil patriot enriched by scholarship, tempered by reason and inspired by the highest ideals of humanism.

What endeared Thani Nayagam most to Tamil leaders and the Tamil speaking people was his direct participation in their protest movements and the Satyagraha campaigns of 1956 and 1961. He boldly broke out of the seclusion of a cloister, risked his position as a University teacher, risked even episcopal intolerance, and played his role in protesting against the "violation of inviolable rights".

While being a lecturer in Education in the Ceylon University, Thani Nayagam entered the Institute of Education, University of London, as a Research Scholar and obtained the Doctorate in Comparative Education, for his thesis: *Ancient European and Indian Systems of Education Compared, with Special Reference to Ancient Tamil Education*. It was at the London University that Thani Nayagam for the first time, perhaps, came under the influence of secular thought and secular humanism. Although in his forties he was yet receptive to new cultural and intellectual influences, which further enriched his unique blend of Christian humanism and Tamil culture. His exposition, if not extolment of the "Aspects of Tamil Humanism" may be seen as a sequel to his research in comparative education at the London University.

In addition to completing his third major research thesis, he continued to be a prolific contributor of both scholarly and popular articles to various journals. He continued as Chief Editor of "*Tamil Culture*", besides being one of its most regular contributors. In 1955, he undertook a study tour of South East Asia. Writing in the *Tamil Culture* after this tour he pointed out the unexplored fields of study relating not only to Tamil influences in South East Asia, but to the general "flux and reflux of inter-cultural movements in South East Asia". He

foresaw the role that the University of Malaya could play in providing opportunities for comparative studies with regard to cultural influences in South East Asia, and expressed the hope that,

"Tamil Culture in South East Asia will form an important subject in the course given by the Department of Indian Studies that the University of Malaya is to inaugurate in the not distant future."

Six years later, in 1961, Thani Nayagam became the first incumbent of the Foundation Chair of the Department of Indian Studies in the University of Malaya. An year before he assumed duties in Kuala Lumpur, he went on a study tour of Adult Education in the U.S.A., Soviet Union and other European Countries, and delivered the Sornammal Endowment Lectures at the Universities of Madras and Annamalai.



Thani Nayagam was no stranger to the Indian and Ceylon Tamil community in Malaya and Singapore. He had been on lecture and study tours to these countries in 1954 and 1955. He had inaugurated in 1954 the annual "Tamilar Vizha" celebrations organized by the Malayan and Singapore Tamils. On 14 January 1955, he had addressed a vast multitude of Tamils assembled at the Happy World Stadium in Singapore for the Pongal Day Celebrations. His eloquent exposition of the "antiquities and unique characteristics" of Tamil literature and Tamil culture, had endeared him to the Tamils in Malaya and Singapore. He was a close friend of the late Mr G. Sarangapany, founder editor of "Tamil Murasu", and an ardent promoter of Tamil cultural and literary activities in the peninsula. Sarangapany and other leaders were extremely keen about the appointment of Thani Nayagam to the Foundation Chair of the Department of Indian studies.

Of "Father's Malaysian Years", Prof. Arasaratnam and others give an excellent account in this volume, and it would be presumptuous, on my part, to venture to add anything more, except to give a brief account of the various events that led to the formation of the International Association of Tamil Research in 1964 and the holding of its first Conference-Seminar in Kuala Lumpur in 1966.

In as much as the founding of the IATR and its subsequent growth owe a great deal to the sustained and dedicated efforts of Thani Nayagam, the very origins of the movement that culminated in the formation of the IATR ought to be traced to the founding of the Quarterly Review, *Tamil Culture* in 1952. The first number of *Tamil Culture* had left the press "with a mission to perform", and during the subsequent years, as Thani Nayagam was to later record with pride,

"Tamil Culture" functioned as a catalyst for Tamil scholars from all over the world, and created the atmosphere and academic fellowship and friendships, whereby the formation of the IATR and the holding of its International Conference were made possible."

Besides the publication of *Tamil Culture* he was instrumental in inaugurating the Tamil Culture Society in Colombo in June 1952, and the Academy of Tamil Culture in Madras in September 1954. These organizations eventually became the representative associations of the IATR after its inception in 1964. The journal *Tamil Culture* became, from 1955, the Journal of the Academy of Tamil Culture, with Thani Nayagam continuing as the Chief Editor.

When the Madras State Tamil Development and Research Council was constituted on 16 February 1959, Thani Nayagam was included as one of the members of the Council. He was the only non-Indian to be included. Of the significance of the new Council, Thani Nayagam writing editorially in the *Tamil Culture* said,

"The constitution of the Madras State Tamil Development and Research Council is a great step forward in equipping and modernising Tamil for the purposes of functioning in a democracy.....Its activities will not only benefit Madras State, but also other countries like Ceylon, Mauritius and South Africa where Tamil functions as a medium of education and civic life."

Soon after assuming duties at the University of Malaya as Professor of Indian Studies, Thani Nayagam publicly emphasized the "great need to modernize Tamil Studies as any other arts group or modern European Language" and mooted the idea of an annual conference of University Heads of Departments of Tamil from Tamil Nad, Ceylon, Malaya, London, Paris and Prague. He further discussed the matter with Mr C. Subramaniam, then a Minister in the Madras State Government and Chairman of the Tamil Development and Research Council, and along with Prof. T. P. Meenakshisundaram formally wrote to the Minister on 27 October 1961. Two years later at a meeting of the Council in August 1963, he proposed that an "International meeting of Tamil scholars might be convened under the auspices of the Tamil Research and Development Council, immediately following the XXVI International Congress of Orientalists to be held in New Delhi in January 1964". The Council made attempts to hold a "World Tamil Conference" from 13 to 17 January 1964 (after the New Delhi Conference of Orientalists), in three sessions, in Madras Annamalai and Madurai. The attempts of the Council proved to be unsuccessful and the "World Tamil Conference" did not take place.

Meanwhile, Thani Nayagam formulated his own plans "to make the XXVI Conference of Orientalists in New Delhi the occasion of forming an Association of Tamilologists". He had by then obtained assurance of Malaysian sponsorship for a conference of Tamil Studies. The National Education (Indian Schools) Development Council of Malaya, thanks to the enthusiastic efforts of its then Secretary, the late Mr V. Selvanayagam and the positive response of its then President the late Mr Manickavasagam (who was also a Minister of the Malaysian Government), had decided, at its meeting on 12 August 1962, to "co-sponsor a Conference of Tamil Studies and help with funds should the University of Malaya take the initiative in the matter".

At the New Delhi Conference, Thani Nayagam along with Prof. V. I. Subramoniam convened a "Special Meeting of Scholars in the Field of Tamil Studies". Sixty

scholars from 15 different countries assembled in New Delhi's Vigya Bhawan, on 7 January 1964, and inaugurated the "International Association of Tamil Research." The meeting unanimously elected Prof. Jean Filliozat as President and Prof. Kamil Zvelebil and Prof. Thani Nayagam as Joint Secretaries of the Association. During the discussions, Thani Nayagam explained that "a proposal to hold an International Conference had not materialized, but that such a conference could be an objective of the association".

After returning from New Delhi to Kuala Lumpur Thani Nayagam succeeded in obtaining full Malaysian sponsorship for the first ever International Conference-Seminar of Tamil Studies, which was eventually and very successfully held in Kuala Lumpur from 16 to 23 April 1966. This was followed by three equally successful and productive Conference-Seminars in Madras (1968), Paris (1970) and Jaffna (1974).

In 1969 the IATR, with Thani Nayagam as the Chief Editor, launched the *Journal of Tamil Studies*. This was to continue the good work performed by his own *Journal of Tamil Culture* which he had founded in 1952 and which had ceased publication since 1966. He was also in the forefront of the moves to establish in Madras an International Institute of Tamil Studies. When he relinquished his duties, in 1969, at the University of Malaya, he yet had hopes of an active future ahead of him. He was Visiting Professor at the College de France in Paris in 1970 and in 1971 he was Visiting Professor at the Naples University in Italy. He fell ill when he was in Naples, returned to Sri Lanka and confined himself to Jaffna, except for a trip to Europe in 1973 and occasional travels to Malaysia.

In 1972 Thani Nayagam delivered the Bunker Memorial Lectures for that year. These lectures are conducted periodically by the premier Christian institution of education in the peninsula, Jaffna College, to honour one of its most eminent former Principals, Rev. Dr Bunker. Thani Nayagam spoke on his favourite theme "Aspects of Tamil Humanism". When Jaffna hosted the Fourth International Conference-Seminar of Tamil Studies, he had become the patriarch of the IATR and the pride of Jaffna. In April 1980 the City Fathers of Jaffna honoured him by extending to him a civic reception. Speaking on the occasion he paid homage to friends, fellow scholars and benefactors who had given him help and assistance during his long period of service in the cause of Tamil culture and Tamil Studies.

On 2 August 1955, Thani Nayagam had sprung into prominence with a popular lecture on "Tamil Culture—Its Past, Present and Future with Special Reference to Ceylon," delivered at the Colombo Town Hall. The subject of the lecture and the manner of its delivery were a combination of "sweetness and light" that delighted not only the Tamilians but several non-Tamilians as well, in those halcyon days of the emerging united Ceylon of the Sinhalese and the Tamils. Twenty five years later when he delivered the Chelvanayakam Memorial Lectures on the "Characteristics of Tamil Culture," the position of the Tamil minorities in the country had changed for the worse. Worse was to come in the year following Thani Nayagam's death. He did not live to see the lamentable happenings in Jaffna during the year 1981. But a grateful people did not fail to honour him, notwithstanding their own

contemporary trials and tribulations. He was given the highest posthumous honour in the City of Madurai during the Fifth International Conference-Seminar held in January 1981. On the eve of his first death anniversary the University of Jaffna conferred on him, posthumously, the Degree of Doctor of Letters *honoris causa*.

— Rajan Philipupillai