

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

THE UNITED STATES today is home to a small but growing population of Sri Lankans from Sinhalese, Tamil, Moor, Burgher and Malay ethnic communities, among others. Sri Lanka's 'best and brightest' have had a long history of taking up temporary residences in North America and Europe for advanced education and professional employment. Since the mid-1980s this profile has changed as greater numbers of Sri Lankans, primarily Tamils, have fled a lengthy civil war in their homeland to seek political asylum abroad, especially in Europe and Canada. Sri Lankans in the United States have shown themselves to be a versatile group of generally well-educated and solidly middle-class families active in the educational, medical, scientific, political, social, commercial, artistic, and philanthropic realms of American society.

HISTORICAL ORIGINS

Sri Lankan Americans descend from a variety of ethnic groups, and the Sinhalese make up roughly half of the community in the United States. Sri Lankan immigrants have been differentiated from other South Asian ethnic groups in public records in the United States only since 1975. Earlier immigrant Sri Lankans were classified either as 'other Asian' or 'South Asian', and the latter description remains on many data-collecting forms today (*American Fact Finder*, U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.). The first Sri Lankans may have arrived towards the end of the 19th century along with roughly two thousand 'other Asians', according to U.S. immigration records—but it is impossible to confirm this. In 1975, fewer than 500 Sri Lankans immigrated to the United States (*American Fact Finder*, U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.).

Violence at home intensified in the 1980s and caused many Sri Lankan Tamils to seek refuge abroad. Few arrived in the United States compared to other countries such as the United Kingdom, India, and Canada. Of the estimated 25,000 Sri Lanka-born living in the United States in 2000, roughly 40 percent were naturalised U.S. citizens who mostly entered before 1989; by contrast, nearly three quarters of non-naturalized citizens entered after 1990, when the number of Sri Lankan asylum-

Map 4.XX



seekers jumped as the danger of civil strife in their homeland grew stronger (*American Fact Finder*, U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.). Notably, between 1989 and 1990, this number increased by a remarkable twenty-seven fold in a twelve-month span.

Over the past decade, an average of 1,300 refugees per year (mostly Tamils) have been granted asylum in the United States [with the exception of 2004–05, in which relatively small numbers were admitted for reasons that are not clear (*Statistics*, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2011)]. Various estimates suggest that roughly 35 to 40 per cent of the Sri Lankan American diaspora today is of Tamil origin, with the remainder largely being Sinhalese. Of the two groups, the former tends to hold a higher profile both within and outside of the United States for their political activism.

SETTLEMENT PATTERNS & POPULATION CHARACTERISTICS

Sri Lankan Americans make up around six per cent of the entire Sri Lankan diaspora. The number of Tamil refugees accepted by the United States remains small especially when compared to Canada and Western Europe. Yet, notwithstanding stringent regulations on immigration, over the past ten years the Sri Lankan population in the United States has grown by an estimated 60 per cent. Many newcomers settle near their corresponding religious

Don Francis Arichi from Sri Lanka takes his citizenship oath as more than 2,700 people are sworn in as US citizens during naturalization ceremonies on April 9, 2009 in Montebello, California.





Sri Lankan fans celebrate during their match against New Zealand during the Pearls Cup T20 Series cricket game being held at the Central Broward Regional Park in Fort Lauderdale, Florida in 2010.



Jenita Jeyarajah and husband Murugupillai appear with their baby, Abilass Jeyarajah, dubbed Baby 81, on 'Good Morning America.' The 4-month-old Sri Lankan boy was ripped from his mother's arms during tsunami and rescued by a neighbor nine hours later. His miraculous survival led nine women to claim him as their own, and his parents had to wait a month before DNA tests proved he was theirs.

Sri Lanka Medical Association of North America Inc. taken during the 35th Annual Sri Lanka Day in 2010 at Gardner Field Recreation Park, Denville, New Jersey.

schools, charities, religious and cultural centres contribute to fostering a sense of collective identity and encouraging the preservation of cultural traditions alongside the incorporation of American values.

Some of the earliest Sri Lankan associations in the United States were formed in the 1970s, and were primarily aimed at promoting the welfare of expatriate members. The very first Sri Lankan-American community organisation—Sri Lanka Association—was established in New York. The inaugural meeting on 2 October 1971, was attended by renowned Sri Lankan diplomat Hamilton Shirley Amerasinghe as well as Ceylon's High Commissioner to Canada William Silva. The association remains an important forum for social and fraternal activities among members, and encourages the retention of Sri Lankan culture among younger generations. It hosts a number of events ranging from annual Christmas gala to dinner dances, Sri Lanka Day celebrations, picnics, sports days and Sri Lankan New Year festivities. Besides serving the largest Sri Lankan community in the U.S., the association also participates in charity activities and actively donates to government-recognised organisations in the homeland.

A similar organisation was formed in 1975 in the American capital. The Sri Lanka Association Washington, D.C. (SLAWDC) facilitates social and cultural interaction alongside the preservation of traditions. It organises three main events every year: the Sinhala-Tamil New Year in April, the Washington-New York Annual Cricket Encounter in the summer, and the New Year's Eve Gala. The association is also home to a plethora of smaller events including an annual Children's Christmas Party, sports tournaments, destination outings, food fairs, youth dances and career-oriented resources such as guidance

communities, whether Buddhist or Hindu. In 2009, the top three states of permanent residence were California, New York and Maryland, followed by New Jersey and Texas (*American Fact Finder*, U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.). Sizeable populations exist in or near cities such as Boston, Chicago, Houston, Los Angeles, Las Vegas, Miami, Newark, New York, Seattle and San Diego, many of which already had established Indian communities. Of these, the New York City metropolitan area claims the largest community of Sri Lankans as well as the highest number of legal permanent resident immigrants. Little Sri Lanka in Staten Island, New York City, is one of the largest Sri Lankan communities outside the homeland itself. Central New Jersey and Los Angeles metropolitan areas claim the next largest communities. Like their Indian counterparts, the Sri Lankan diaspora in the United States tends to be comprised mainly of highly educated professionals. Of those born in Sri Lanka, more than half over 25 years of age hold bachelors and professional or graduate degrees. The vast majority speaks a language other than English at home, but the same number also converses in English fluently. Sri Lankan families earn about one-fifth higher than the national median family income and have lower poverty rates than national averages as well. The majority of immigrants work in managerial and professional occupations in education, health, social, scientific and services industries (*American Fact Finder*, U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.).

Many Sri Lankan Americans are successfully involved in business and demonstrate a strong sense of innovation and philanthropy (indeed, Sri Lankans in general were deemed the eighth most generous people in the world, according to the *World Giving Index* by the British-based Charities Aid Foundation). For example, the well-known non-profit organisation The Indus Entrepreneurs (TiE) was started by South Asian-origin entrepreneurs and professionals in Silicon Valley with the intention of fostering free enterprise around the globe through networking, affiliation and intellectual capital pools.

ASSOCIATIONS

A growing number of Sri Lankan associations, language



seminars and professional events by notable speakers—all of which are intended to appeal to a diverse body of members. While the organisation eschews political affiliation, it has from time to time participated in drought relief, medical assistance or charitable giving events for compatriots in Sri Lanka. An affiliate organisation, the tax-exempt Sri Lanka Association of Greater Washington (SLAGW), was set up in 2001 to field charitable and educational activities, and has received generous community support since its inception.

In recent years, the number of Sri Lankan organisations in the U.S. has proliferated. That augmentation is largely the product of an increase in the size of the Sri Lankan-American population. While it is true that the growth of ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka has resulted in some Tamil emigrants distancing themselves from pan-Sri Lankan associations, at the same time there have been efforts by these organisations to foster a sense of fraternity. Amongst these include initiatives by the Sri Lanka Association of New England (SLANE). The organisation, created by 50 Sri Lankan Americans in 1998 in Cambridge, Massachusetts, has sought to promote friendship, goodwill, peace and unity among the Sri Lankan community within and in neighbouring regions of the state. SLANE has attempted to raise public awareness of and interest



to learn about their heritage in fun, interactive ways. The project simultaneously collects supplies to deliver to a school in Sri Lanka, and is one of three projects involving Sri Lankan-American youth in community service.

A distinctive feature of some of the more recent Sri Lankan American associations is the tendency to concentrate on educational and charitable activities. For example the Educate Lanka Foundation (ELF) launched in 2007 by two young Sri Lankan student expatriates at the University of Maryland, the non-profit organisation has sought to empower through education. With advisory guidance from two Sri Lankan-American professors and the greater Washington, D.C. area Sri Lankan community, ELF has developed a unique web-centric peer-to-peer model to enable underprivileged students in Sri Lanka to continue their education through micro financing. The foundation locates Sri Lankans around

in Sri Lanka's political and economic situation; to welcome new arrivals from Sri Lanka, especially students; to commemorate important national events; and to provide a forum for social, cultural and welfare community activities. Besides Christmas and National Day celebrations, the organisation hosts an annual Discover Sri Lanka project organised by young members for children



Sri Lankan American Association of Houston (SLAAH) advertising the Channa-Upuli Performing Arts Institute from Sri Lanka for a ballet workshop that would be of interest to the Sri Lankan diaspora in Houston.



Dance performance by the Sri Lanka Foundation (SLF) at Santa Monica, California.



Sri Lankan cultural parade down the Third Street Promenade.

SRI LANKA FOUNDATION (SLF)

Located in Los Angeles, California, the SLF mission is to help Sri Lankan communities worldwide and advance international awareness of the cultural, artistic, philosophical and technical merits of Sri Lanka. The non-profit organisation was created in 2003 by well-known Sri Lankan-American doctor Walter Jayasinghe. The SLF publishes *Expatriate Sri Lankan Good News*, a magazine that circulates to more than 10,000 Sri Lankan households around the globe and publicises relevant cultural and social events. An electronic version of the publication is available on the foundation's website alongside world news, political events, analyses, editorials and opinions,

among other categories, of interest to the Sri Lankan diaspora. The SLF hosts an annual one-day Sri Lanka Day Expo event on the Santa Monica Third Street Promenade, featuring Sri Lankan musicians, dancers, food and businesses. The expo has attracted nearly a 100,000 Sri Lankans and Americans from around the world, and a cultural parade known as 'PERAHERA' is the main attraction. Additionally, the foundation holds an annual award ceremony in Los Angeles—the Sri Lanka Foundation Awards—to honour deserving members of the expatriate community in all disciplines. As part of a youth outreach focus, the organization hosts the Youth Expatriate Sri Lankans (YES!) World Youth Conference to foster

networking, appreciation of Sri Lankan culture, and the development of plans to aid the island nation. To address other aspects of Sri Lankan assimilation, the SLF stages an annual Miss Sri Lanka-America beauty pageant and fashion show to showcase Sri Lankan ethnic beauty to the American mainstream. Another popular event is the Cultural Concert, which brings well-known Sri Lankan performers before appreciative audiences. Finally, the foundation maintains social networking sites to facilitate community contact via mediums such as Facebook, MySpace, Flickr and Second Life.

Christmas Dinner and Dance in 2010 by the Sri Lanka Association of New York (SLANY).



the world and awards individually generated scholarships to academically-promising students. Currently, ELF sponsors over 250 students from all ages, religion and ethnic groups in Sri Lanka, and has contributed over \$100,000 in scholarships. ELF also possesses a strong network of over a hundred volunteers both in the United States and Sri Lanka. The foundation participates in educational infrastructure development and other projects that improve the quality of education in the most needed areas of the country through fundraisers, donations and grants. In May 2011, ELF was among a handful of organisations selected to be part of U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's Global Diaspora Forum, during which its financing platform was widely acknowledged as a successful working model. Another organisation that has focused on educational initiatives is the New England Lanka Academy (NELA). The academy provides a gateway to Sri Lankan arts and sciences. The institution brings together academics, intellectuals and experts to share their experiences with the public, facilitating connections between specialists in the United States and their counterparts in Sri Lanka. It also aims to promote interaction and collaboration with the general public. Examples of activities include workshops on land robotics and Sri Lankan performing arts hosted at Harvard University, and on Sri Lankan drumming and dancing at Clark University.



Demonstrators wear t-shirts calling for an end to alleged genocide of Tamils by the Sri Lankan government during a protest against the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank on 26 April 2009 at a park across from the World Bank building in Washington, D.C.

DIASPORA POLITICS

While Sri Lankans identify themselves along various ethnic, linguistic, religious and regional identities, Tamils from the war-torn north and northeastern areas of the island have come to identify themselves as a distinct community both at home and abroad (Srikandarajah 2005). Often sympathetic to the LTTE in the past, the Tamil diaspora has significant lobbies in the United States and generally maintains a higher profile around the world over their mostly Sinhalese counterparts. For its part, the United States Department of State designated the LTTE, notorious for their use of suicide bombers, as a foreign terrorist organisation in 1997. The State Department then altered this characterisation to specially designated global terrorist (SDGT) in 2001. One consequence of this is the fact that the United States declines to extend asylum to any of its members. Combined with the more stringent overall immigration procedures, these designations likely account for the far fewer numbers of Tamil immigrants admitted into the United States especially when compared to its northern neighbour, Canada.

Overall, transnational ties, political discourse and influence within a widespread Tamil diaspora were a critical mechanism for strengthening support for the Tamil cause within the homeland and direct Sri Lankan politics. The Tamil diaspora was intimately involved in the insurgency, using technology and social structures to mobilise and organise a specific diasporic identity that was strengthened over time (Fair 2005). Tamils all over the globe tend to view themselves as members of a single diaspora shaped by the politics within their home country. Shared grievances linked to ethnic identity, subordination and war tactics have, at times, attracted the attention of both the media and authorities in their countries of residences, which in turn has led to some clashes with local governments.

PRO-LTTE NETWORKS IN THE UNITED STATES

The political activism of the Tamil American diaspora is

BUDDHIST VIHARAS, MEDITATION CENTRES & SOCIETIES

The Bhavana Society. Founded in 1985, the Bhavana Society began building a meditation centre in a mountainous forest region of West Virginia—not too far from Washington, D.C. The centre was opened in 1988, and expanded in the years that followed. With the aim of protecting the Theravada forest meditation tradition within the context of Western culture, the Society provides a monastery for ordained monks and nuns to live as well as training and ordination for lay candidates. It also offers meditation retreats for the public, and is home to long-term resident laypersons. The founding abbot, Venerable Bhante Dr. Henepola Gunaratana, was born in rural Sri Lanka and was fully ordained as a monk at age 20, in 1947. Popularly known as 'Bhante G,' the internationally-recognised author and teacher spent five years doing missionary work among the Harijanas (Untouchables) of India and ten years in Malaysia before coming to the United States in 1968. He has worked as a chaplain at American University, where he obtained his PhD, and served as president of the Washington, D.C., Buddhist Vihara. He is the highest-ranking monk of his sect in North America.

The New England Buddhist Vihara and Meditation Center.

Led by several Sri Lankan Theravada monks with experience practicing and teaching Buddhism and meditation techniques in Sri Lanka, South Korea and the United States, the centre is open to anyone who seeks solutions to life's problems in a peaceful and understanding environment regardless of personal beliefs. Registered as an official non-profit organisation in Framingham, Massachusetts, the centre emphasizes loving kindness, compassion and caring. Along with meditation classes, it holds discussion sessions of Buddhist philosophy and counseling sessions based on Dhamma teachings and special instructional classes for teenagers and children. The centre occupies a 140-year old house, home to four resident monks, and serves over one 100 New England families including those of Sri Lankan, Vietnamese, Bengali, Indian, Cambodian and Euro-American descent.

Ohio Buddhist Vihara. This Cincinnati, Ohio temple lists its primary objectives as providing for the spiritual, religious and educational needs of men and women of all faiths. It is serving the diverse spiritual needs of Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike; teaching and practicing meditation techniques in a free-of-charge environment; and providing a cultural and social centre for Buddhists and non-Buddhist attendees. Inaugurated in October 2003, the vihara is involved in educational and humanitarian relief activities in Sri Lanka, such as providing scholarships to local students as well as offering aid and helping reconstruction following the 2004 South Asian tsunami that devastated the island. Due to the growing attendance of worshippers, including the attendance and interest of Christians and other non-Buddhists, as well as Buddhists from all over the Midwestern region, the temple intends to expand its physical accommodations.

Houston Buddhist Vihara. Founded in 1988, this Houston, Texas vihara offers Dhamma classes and Pali (the language of ancient texts of the Theravada tradition) lessons to enable study. Other practices

include instruction of Abhidhamma, an in-depth metaphysical analysis of the mind and mental factors to advance understanding of Buddha's teachings; chanting; and the observance of eight precepts over the more commonly-held five (abstinence from killing living beings, from taking others' belongings, from sexual misconduct, from intoxicating drugs and drink). The stated purpose of the temple is to promote Buddhist practice and insight in the minds of people; to advance cultural understanding; to advocate peace among nations; and to propagate places for Buddhist fellowship. Ministering to a sizable Sri Lankan expatriate community, the scholarly venue offers classes in English and Vietnamese and is open to all.

Minnesota Buddhist Vihara. The Minneapolis-based vihara has affiliate temples in North and South Dakota, Iowa, Wisconsin and Nebraska, all founded by the Minnesotan temple abbot and president the Ven. Witiyala Seewalie Thera, established since 2004. The mission of the headquarters is to create a peaceful and harmonious world. Venerable Seewalie also serves as a volunteer chaplain in the local police department and holds monthly meditation sessions for penitentiary inmates. To acknowledge his services in disseminating the teachings of Buddha, he was invited by Sri Lankan president Mahinda Rajapakse to visit the president's official residence in Sri Lanka. Temple classes are given in epistemology, theory of knowledge, ethics and basic teachings. Other services include counseling, a dhamma school, dhamma discussions, sil observations, meditation sessions, visitations, blessings and offerings, a meditation retreat centre, language training and cultural activities to all communities in the area.



In 2005, about 175 students, faculty and residents in a candlelight vigil on the campus of Arizona State University sponsored by the Sri Lankan Student Association to honour victims of the tsunami. The student group and another group in Tucson, Arizona, hoped to raise enough money to rebuild homes in Sri Lanka.

Berkeley Buddhist Vihara.

Registered as a religious non-profit organisation in 2002, the Bay-area vihara coordinated with another Sri Lankan temple, the nearby Dharmapala Institute, to use local connections for rescue, clean-up and reconstruction efforts following the 2004 Boxing Day tsunami through a Disaster Relief Fund. Together, the temples collected food, clothing and medical supply donations, helmed toy and backpack drives, and organised a team of doctors to visit remote villages of Sri Lanka. Donations and support from the surrounding community were received from groups such as the Church of Latter Day Saints, local elementary schools, the Jain community and the San Jose

Sikh Gurwara Community. Weekly activities at the temple include a Sinhala-language Sunday School for children in addition to annual Vesak and Poson ceremonies, Vas Aradhana, Katina, Atavisi Buddha Pooja and New Year's ceremonies alongside monthly sermons, Dhamma discussions and special Buddha Pooja.

Georgia Buddhist Vihara. Open in Atlanta, Georgia since the summer of 2000, the vihara serves the religious needs of the region through daily chanting, puja and meditation, weekly Vipassana Meditation Dhamma school, Poya (Uposatha) full moon observance, Dhamma discussion and a meditation retreat alongside traditional temple services. Their aim is to educate the young and old in the cultural practices of Sri Lanka and other Buddhist countries, as well as encourage the practice of *Dana* (generosity), *Sila* (morality) and *Bhavana* (meditation). The vihara administers to Atlanta's large and growing South Asian population of well over one 100,000.



Sri Lankan-Americans form a line to help pass along food and clothing outside the Buddhist Vihara Temple to aid tsunami victims in Sri Lanka. This was done in the Queens Village neighbourhood of the Queens borough of New York City.

undoubtedly shaped by the presence of well over 200,000 Tamils living in primarily the Greater Toronto area of Ontario, Canada—home to the largest Tamil community outside of Sri Lanka and India. Both within Canada and beyond, many Tamil organisations were set up explicitly to enable the LTTE's infamously global outreach. Diasporic political activism was often realised through associations that worked to raise awareness of what was sometimes referred to as Tamil 'genocide' in Sri Lanka and aired grievances against anti-Tamil activities in the Sri Lankan capital, Colombo.

In Washington, Tamil expatriates formed lobbying groups such as Americans for Peace in Sri Lanka and Tamils for Justice. The New York Ilankai Tamil Sangam, the most active group representing Tamils in the United States, was formed in the aftermath of the 1977 anti-Tamil riots in Sri Lanka and was believed to be an umbrella organisation for the LTTE. Similarly, the World Tamil Coordinating Committee (WTCC) in the United States was revealed to be a satellite organisation of the LTTE, when the FBI arrested New York resident Karunakaran Kandasamy. He reportedly was orchestrating U.S.-based LTTE support by using various charity fundraisers in the wake of the tsunami as a guise to channel funds through the WTCC. This was followed by earlier arrests of several Sri Lankan expatriates in Maryland, who were subsequently imprisoned and deported for providing material support to the LTTE. Other charities, such as the U.S. branch of the Tamil Rehabilitation Organisation (TRO), have been shut down by the U.S. Treasury Department for LTTE support.

Before the LTTE was designated as a terrorist organisation, a number of wealthy Tamil Americans and a network of pro-Tamil Tiger professionals gave generous support to the group. After 1997, such support necessarily assumed a covert profile in the United States, though it remained prolific in Canada. All U.S.-based organizations naturally looked northward for funds and moral support. Taking advantage of the easy access afforded by the open border between the United States and Canada, American organisers mobilised Canadian LTTE sympathisers to travel by bus to Washington to participate in rallies and protests. Further punctuating the proximity between American and Canadian Tamils, New York-based lawyer Visvanathan Rudrakumar—who maintained close ties with government officials in both countries and who once reportedly operated as an LTTE emissary—coordinated the Canadian Supreme Court defense of a notable leader of the LTTE imprisoned in Canada.

Yet, at certain times, the Tamil diaspora has exerted influence by pulling back funding to encourage the LTTE to seek out peace with Colombo. As the LTTE appeared to lose its military strategy, the diplomatic calculation of the pro-Tamil Tiger ideology grew more concrete. In a May 2010 interview with the well-known blog *Politico's* Laura Rozen in Washington, D.C., Sri Lankan Minister of Foreign Affairs Gamini Lakshman Peiris summarised the current situation:

The war has come to an end in Sri Lanka, the military action is over, and the LTTE cannot rearm and regroup to fight a war again on the shores of Sri Lanka, but that doesn't mean that they have no influence elsewhere. The huge financial resources they have accumulated over ...[a] quarter of a century are still at their disposal, and they have a

very sophisticated communication network. The diaspora is still very active in Western capitals and multilateral institutions, and they're basically waging an economic war with Sri Lanka—their activities have been transferred from the field of battle to the field of diplomacy.

According to the *Asian Tribune* (Gamage, 4 June 2010), the Tamil lobby reportedly infiltrated rights groups such as Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and the International Crisis Group to gain access to principal agencies like the U.S. State Department, Congressional committees, and even the Congressional Research Service and the Library of Congress. Well-educated siblings of Tamil expatriates held intern or staff positions at various offices of influential Senators and Congresspersons, and sympathisers occupied key posts for access. The newspaper took aim at the Sri Lankan embassy in particular, citing miscalculation of LTTE influence in the United States and decrying their failure to counter LTTE-backed propaganda. To a large extent, embassy diplomats reportedly outsourced their public and media relations responsibilities to a high-priced Washington, D.C., lobbying service in a last-ditch attempt to burnish the image of Sri Lanka in the eyes of Washington (Gamage 10 August 2008).

The non-governmental organisation (NGO) sector, which influences Washington's foreign policy agenda, and various U.S. government agencies became sites of introduction to the Tamil narrative of brutal Sinhalese domination. This led to a seeming departure from standard procedures. While the State Department viewed the LTTE as a terrorist organisation, for example, it did not seek to eliminate the group as it does with Al Qaeda. Instead, the American government hoped to use the LTTE as a pressure group to make changes in the Sri Lankan polity (U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations 2009). Another mechanism to advance the LTTE agenda in government and steer the perception of the Colombo administration's policy is through making use of bodies such as the United States Tamil Political Action Council (USTPAC). Meanwhile, former U.S. Department of Justice attorney-turned-lobbyist Bruce Fein, once linked to the Tamils for Justice/Justice for Tamils organisation, publicly spearheaded a lengthy mission to remove the LTTE from the State Department's global terrorist list.

Yet in Washington, not all activities on behalf of Sri Lankans are organised by high-profile activist groups. For example, nationals of Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslim backgrounds and other supporters gathered near the White House in 2010 to protest the LTTE's treatment



Tamil supporters ask for help from the United States during a protest in front of the White House on 18 May 2009 in Washington, D.C.

NOTABLE SRI LANKAN-AMERICANS

Ananda Coomaraswamy (1877–1947). Born in Sri Lanka but raised in England, Ananda Coomaraswamy was a philosopher recognised for his exploration of the metaphysical realm. Although he studied natural sciences at university, eventually earning a doctorate in Ceylonese mineralogy, he went on to cultivate an influence in the art world. With the aim of introducing the West to Indian Art, he went on to serve as curator of the Boston Fine Arts Museum in 1917, where he remained until his death. There, he amassed the first large collection of Indian Art in the United States. Coomaraswamy made significant contributions to the fields of philosophy, literature and religion as well, and is credited with founding an esoteric philosophical movement, Perennialism, alongside French metaphysicist René Guénon and Swiss-German philosopher Frithjof Schuon. Reportedly fluent in twelve languages, Coomaraswamy used intellectual exploration and anti-imperialist conviction to build a two-way bridge between West and East that served to cultivate appreciation for the richness of Indian heritage.



Ananda Coomaraswamy

Muhammad Raheem Bawa Muhaiyaddeen (Unknown–1986). Described as a saintly, Tamil-speaking Sufi mystic, the figure of Bawa Muhaiyaddeen retains a numinous aura. Reportedly emerging from the jungles of Sri Lanka in the 1940s, Bawa Muhaiyaddeen travelled to various northern shrines performing acts of medical and spiritual healing, including exorcisms. After gaining renown and being invited to Philadelphia by an American woman in 1971, Bawa Muhaiyaddeen remained there teaching a doctrine of universal peace, unity and equality until his death. People from all walks of life would gather to hear him speak, and he became known for doling out pacifist-oriented advice to world leaders during the Iranian Hostage Crisis in the late 1970s, and to United Nations Assistant Secretary General Dr. Robert Muller. A Philadelphia mosque bearing his name continues to be a place of pilgrimage for Sufis, Muslims, Christians and followers of other religions who admire his efforts to forge unity through understanding and empathy.

Cyril Ponnampereuma (1923–94). Born in Galle, Sri Lanka, and educated in India and the United Kingdom, Cyril Ponnampereuma researched the origin of life at the University of California, Berkeley, where he received his doctorate in 1962. The following year, he took over the Chemical Evolution Division at NASA, contributing directly to the Project Apollo, Viking and Voyager space programs. His analysis of moon dust for the Apollo Program earned him cover stories in magazines and newspapers such as *Time* and *Newsweek*. Dr. Ponnampereuma was associated with a variety of academic institutions ranging from the Arthur C. Clarke Centre for Modern Technologies in



A 1979 image of geochemist Dr. Cyril Ponnampereuma in Maryland, posing beside meteorite containing amino acids formed outside Earth's atmosphere.

Sri Lanka to the Chinese Academy of Sciences, the World Academy of Art and Science, the Atomic Energy Commission of India, UNESCO and the University of Maryland. In 1994, he suffered a heart attack while at his lab for Chemical Evolution at the University of Maryland in College Park. Dr. Ponnampereuma was widely known for his sanguine belief that a chemical explanation for the origin of life could be found. His *New York Times* obituary stated that the Sri Lankan-born scientist had "no doubt at all" that life could some day be created in a laboratory.

Rosemary Rogers (1932–). Dubbed "the Queen of Historical Romance" à la Harlequin style, Rosemary Jantz was born in Ceylon to wealthy Dutch-Portuguese settlers. After completing three years at the University of Ceylon, she horrified her family by becoming a reporter and marrying a Ceylonese rugby player and track star Summa Navaratnam. Eleven years later, amid rumours of his infidelity, she moved to London where she met her second husband, an African-American named Leroy Rogers. They married in St. Louis, Missouri and, along with her extended family, relocated to California. When that marriage broke up a few years later, she was left to provide for her four children and her destitute parents, who had fled Ceylon with hardly a cent during a socialist takeover in 1969. Putting pen to paper, Rogers first manuscript, 'Sweet Savage Love,' rose to the top of bestseller charts in record time. Known for themes of violence against women, exotic travel and rags-to-riches storylines, Rogers asserted that she herself was her heroine and that her life story could easily be one of her own plots. Having sold millions of novels around the globe, Rogers continues to write and dominate the world of historical romance.



Stanley Tambiah

Stanley Jeyaraja Tambiah (1929–). After being raised in a Christian Tamil family and attending the University of Ceylon, Tambiah earned a PhD in anthropology from Cornell University. His field work has shifted from Sri Lanka to Thailand and back to Sri Lanka, where ethnic conflict engaged his interest. Fascinated by the interplay between magic, science and religion, Tambiah studied the role of competition between religious and ethnic identities in the long-lasting conflict on the island, and his original interpretations collectively formed an invaluable contribution to Asian scholarship. Tambiah served in various academic posts ranging from a UNESCO teaching assistant in Thailand and the National Research Council's Committee for International Conflict Resolution to positions at the Universities of Ceylon, Cambridge, Chicago and King's College before joining the faculty at Harvard University in 1976. The world-renowned anthropologist has been awarded three honorary doctorates, prestigious fellowships and international acclaim. In 2005, the Harvard Foundation commissioned his portrait to grace the walls of the institution at which he served.



Sanjay Kumar, Chairman, President and CEO, Computer Associates is seen at the Northern Virginia Technology Council monthly 'Titans of Technology Meeting' at the McLean Hilton in McLean, Virginia, 14 January 2004.

Sanjay Kumar (1942–). The one-time Colombo native moved to the United States as a teenager and settled with his family in South Carolina. Kumar attended Furman University, but left without completing his degree. After being hired at Computer Associates International, Inc. (now known as CA, the second-largest manufacturer of mainframe computers and software after IBM) in 1987, he quickly rose through the ranks to lead the company in 1994 when he was appointed President and COO at the age of 31. By 2002, he was both Chairman and CEO—positions he was forced to resign a mere two years later when he was convicted of securities fraud, obstruction of justice and conspiracy as well as an elaborate cover-up scheme for which he received an eight-year prison sentence and a eight million-dollar fine in November 2006. Kumar is known for personally advancing the infamous "35-day month" practice, an accounting fraud scheme that saw the books being kept open past the end of fiscal periods in order to claim advance revenue for the previous quarter. Books were closed only when it was determined that CA had generated enough revenue to meet quarterly projections. The company is now paying \$225 million back to shareholders to compensate for a reported more than \$400 million loss. Kumar himself will pay \$798.6 million in restitution, which may be garnished from his future gross annual pay following his release from prison.

Ananda W. P. Guruge (1928–). The Sri Lankan diplomat, author and Buddhist leader graduated from the University of Ceylon at the age of 19 and went on to earn a PhD from the University of London. By 23, he took the Ceylon civil service exam and began his career as a diplomat. He served as Sri Lankan ambassador to France, UNESCO and the United States, and then as a senior special adviser to the director-general of UNESCO. Dr. Guruge is proficient in English, Sinhala, French, Pali, Sanskrit, Tamil and Hindi, and has held a variety of academic and leadership posts at the Los Angeles-based University of the West, California State University Fullerton, and the World Fellowship of Buddhists in addition to being Chairman of the World Buddhist University Council, Patron of the European Buddhist Union and winner of the 2004 Sri Lankan Foundation Lifetime Achievement Award. He has written over 50 books in English and Sinhala as well as more than 175 research papers on Asian history, Buddhism and education.



Reportedly the youngest singer to participate in the Young Artists Studio at the Metropolitan Opera, Danielle de Niese is a lyric soprano who developed a successful operatic career from a very young age. Of Sri Lankan Burgher heritage, she was only nine when she became the youngest winner of the Young Talent Time—an Australian TV talent competition. She moved to America from Australia as a teenager. Danielle de Niese is well known for her performance as Cleopatra in David McVicar's staging of Giulio Cesare at Glyndebourne in 2005, as well as for various other operatic productions.



Former U.S. President Bill Clinton, U.S. Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton and Buddhist monks listen as Venerable Pandit Piyatissa speak during a visit to the New York Buddhist Vihara on 31 December 2004 in the Queens borough of New York City. The Clintons toured the temple where volunteers have been collecting donations for victims of the tsunami in Sri Lanka.

of Tamil civilians. The *Asian Tribune* reported the large gathering as assembling on 'short notice and little organisation', and providing a visible counter to the propaganda of 'pro-LTTE professionals and activists' (Gamage, 22 February 2009) in America. Congress also funds groups such as The Asia Foundation, which has occupied a 'quiet but important' role in strengthening democratic institutions in the country and supporting the Sri Lankan government long before civil war broke out and the Tamil diaspora took shape (U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations 2009).

DIASPORA INFLUENCE ON U.S.— SRI LANKAN RELATIONS

While Western countries with large Tamil diasporas grew critical of Sri Lanka's handling of the war and human rights record, non-traditional, no-strings-attached sources of aid and investment—like China—stepped in to fill the void left by Western donors that preferred to qualify the terms of their loans (Mendis, 2010). This shift was charted by a Senate Foreign Relations report, the Kerry-Lugar Report, which noted the decisive role China played in determining the outcome of the conflict by providing massive funding to the Sri Lankan government that was then used to defeat the LTTE. Observing that the political environment in Sri Lanka was 'not as black and white as many outside observers believe', the report quoted Sri Lankan government officials citing American refusal to 'help Sri Lanka finish the war against the LTTE', for pushing the country to develop relationships with countries such as Burma, China, Iran and Libya (U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations 2009). Concerns for human rights and other humanitarian issues, whether overstated or legitimate, led the United States to curb aid to the Sri Lankan Government. Colombo found it difficult to deal with the 'stick' approach employed by Washington, often lobbied by the Tamil diaspora, and relations between the two countries soured. The report closed by noting that future U.S. policy toward Sri Lanka ought not to be dominated by 'a single agenda' which 'shortchanges U.S. geostrategic interests in the region' (U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations 2009).

In sum, although the civil conflict in Sri Lanka officially came to an end in 2009, the diaspora's self-perception remains largely ethno-centered. Despite residing mainly in liberal host countries, the community tends to stay tied to the traditional loyalties and social frameworks of their homeland. This highly politicised

atmosphere is what migrants are welcomed into, which, while easing the process of integration into the local community, often simultaneously assimilates new arrivals into an anti-Colombo, pro-Tamil movement. However, in comparison to the Tamil Canadian diaspora (whose activities have received much scrutiny from Canadian media and authorities), the Tamil-American community goes largely unnoticed by the press. The United States' early action to designate the LTTE as a terrorist organisation and prohibit fundraising on their behalf likely discouraged the formation of a robust and overtly politically active Tamil diaspora like that in Canada, which held no such view or prohibition against LTTE support until much later.

Participation rates in events such as protests and demonstrations were far fewer in the United States than in other countries with established Tamil diasporas. This is probably partly due to the fact that a larger percentage of Sri Lankan Americans arrived before 1990, looking for economic opportunity rather than political asylum. These typically professional immigrants escaped the bulk of the violence in Sri Lanka and as a group they appear to identify less with Tamil identity than later migrants, which has allowed for more complete integration into American society. One sign of this is that second generation Sri Lankan Americans tend to be highly Americanised and largely isolated from transnational diaspora politics. Young, second-generation immigrants also help each other with assimilation, and a plethora of South Asian and Indian student associations and cultural groups exist to aid newcomers. Another reason for the seeming lack of interest in Tamil politics in general is that the dispersion of Sri Lankans across the country has led to the absence of large Tamil communities (to rectify this, an allegedly LTTE dominated-Federation of Tamil Sangams of North America, FeTNA, was established in 1987).

Finally, while international Tamil political activities are carried out in high-profile public forums designed to attract attention, pro-Tiger Tamil Americans seem to prefer a Washington-centric strategy of relying on key individuals in positions of influence, as well as a network of savvy elites and professionals, to advance their agenda. This has led to less militancy within the Tamil American community and Washington has been, for the most part, a bit player in Sri Lankan politics. As Washington seeks to rework the power balance in its relations with Colombo, it may move away from advancing the Tamil agenda. This could cause a more noticeable split between Tamil Americans and the international Tamil diaspora, or could cause more radical Tamil Americans to reach out to a greater extent to their counterparts in Canada where the LTTE retains a much stronger hold.

Patrick Mendis



Dinner and Dance night by the Sri Lanka Association Washington, DC (SLAWDC).