

Interview: Dr P. Veerasamy in Conversation with Mr. Antonythasan alias Shobasakthi

Dr P. Veerasamy*  

This interview captures the reflections of the Tamil writer, Mr Antonythasan, alias Shobasakthi, a Sri Lankan diasporic writer who writes in Tamil from France. This indispensable interview is conducted by Dr P. Veerasamy, who raised insightful and incisive questions, through a questionnaire, and recorded the responses that focus on the backdrop of the Sri Lankan ethnic clash with references to his novel, *Traitor*.

The responses to all the questions were received on 19 Jul 2016 12:58:46 +0530 through email, veerasamymeera@gmail.com, and were originally typed in Tamil by Mr Antonythasan, alias Shobasakthi. For the purpose of disseminating the data for research, Dr. P. Veerasamy translated the responses into English. The original Tamil interview is reproduced in full at the end of this article.

The Interview:

1. Are you the victim of 1983 riots? If yes, what is your reaction to the riot?

No, but my father and younger brother were the victims of the riots.

2. Why did you give the title, *Traitor* to the novel?

I designated the title as Mm in Tamil. The publisher changed it as Traitor when it was published in English.

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3. Why does Nesakumaran want to bomb Urathurai Police Station?

The police did their anti-Tamil activities by torturing and murdering the Tamil militants and also ordinary Tamil youth. In response to this, the militant youths attacked the police stations.

4. Nesakumaran is taken to Guru Nagar Army Camp. What is done at the camp usually by the army?

The Sri Lankan government set up many military camps after implementing the Prevention of Terrorism Act. Guru Nagar Army Camp is one such camp. Many Tamil youths were arrested and detained there. It's a torture camp.

5. Kindly give your views about Annai Iravu Sea Salt Refinery Army Camp mentioned in the novel, *Traitor*.

Annai Iravu Sea Salt Refinery Army Camp has a separate antiquity. This is a very big camp which is in the strategic location which divides Jaffna Peninsula from the wide landmass, Sri Lanka.

6. Give your opinions about Annai Iravu Sea Salt Refinery Army Camp?

This camp is the place which is occupied by the Sinhalese racial fanatics.

7. What do you think of Udugambolla's assassination method of putting a pencil into the ear and hitting it with a hammer in *Traitor*?

Murder through inserting the pencil into ears is brutal and uncivilised. The Sri Lankan army has this torture method besides other torture methods.

8. What do you say about this torture method?

It's the violation of human rights as well as war crime.

9. In the camp, the Tamils narrate Srikanthamalar's torture and murder. Was it the mode of punishment for all the women?

Yes, there were many other brutal torture methods other than this. There's news that many women escaped from such torture. Besides, the method of torture and punishment are determined based on how one cooperates with the army.

10. *Traitor* is based on the real incidents occurred in two prisons. Give your opinion about Wellikade and Batticaloa prisons.

The Wellikade prison is the place where torture is done mainly. As it's located in the Tamil area, there are no troubles for the Tamils.

11. Give your opinion about 1977 and 1981 riots? And what are the reasons for them?

They are the planned violent and brutal activities of the Sri Lankan government to restrain the Tamils through genocide. The Ministers of the Government presided over them. During the 1981 ethnic riot, the police burnt 90000 books of our Jaffna library.

12. How long have you been in Wellikade prison?

The Mahara Prison is a large penitentiary. I was there for four months. This is situated at a distance of 10 kilometres from the Wellikade Prison.

13. “Mendis hit my soldier with his axe” Who is this ‘my’ in *Traitor*?

This is none other than Nesakumaran.

14. Who is Kanagaratnam Shanmuganathan? What do you think about Shanmuganathan?

This is a real incident. This is a dreadful example for how war oppresses the ordinary.

15. How did you collect details to write this novel?

I read about it from different sources. Some prisoners shared about incidents happened when I was in the prison.

16. On pages 146 and 147 in *Traitor*, you have given the statistics of murders committed by the Sri Lankan Army, Navy, the Special Forces, the LTTE at the places like Chinnagam market, Chettikulam, Mannar, Ariyalai, Velvettithurai, Anuradhapura, and Udumbankulam, respectively. Is that statistics true?

All information mentioned on these pages are actual incidents. There are many evidences to prove them.

17. You were a child soldier. You fought for the Tamils. The LTTE also fought for the Tamils. On the 147th page, you say: “There is no difference between the liberation fighters and the government army”.

Yes, I realised it over the course of the time. The liberation fighters did inexorable atrocities to the government army. They killed the innocent Tamil, Sinhalese and Muslims as well.

18. What is your opinion about the sentence in *Traitor*: “The Sinhala people have never been our enemy” (147).

Yes, the racist Sinhala government as well as the army are only our grave enemies. The Sinhalese are our comrades.

19. As mentioned in the novel, are the proceedings and judgments of the court ridiculous in Sri Lanka?

Yes, this is what happened to me.

20. Kindly explain: Even as he is halfway to the courtroom, the sentence of seven years or fourteen years have been announced” (154).

Yes, that was the time the entire judiciary had been gangrenous with racist bias. The sentence is announced even before.

21. What is E.P.R.L.F group?

This is a militant armed group with leftist ideology which fights for the liberation of the Tamils.

22. As a native Sri Lankan, you witnessed the war and even participated in it. What could be the solution to this problem?

The war with weapons would lead to destruction and decay. Solutions could be attained only through negotiations. I think that self-governance of the state, as in India, would be suitable solution to all Tamils.

23. In *Traitor*, who is the traitor? Nesakumaran?

Yes, he is a traitor because he betrays his own friends.

24. What do you think of the burning of Jaffna Library?

This is an integral part of the genocide and the barbaric attitude of the Sri Lankan government.

25. You have a wide contact all over the world and familiar with what is happening in Sri Lanka after the war. What is the position of the present government? Have the displaced settled in their native place. Is prevailing there?

The Present government is progressing like a snail.

26. According to me, the refugees live in many countries. They have lost everything. Now they are studying and working in their host countries. If they return to Sri Lanka, would they be treated equally and educational and employment opportunities be given to them?

No, the Sri Lankan refugees who emigrated to Europe, Canada and Australia. Only those who emigrated to India are likely to return.

27. Is *Traitor* an autobiographical novel?

No, It's not. Only Gorilla is the autobiographical novel.

The Interview in Tamil: Original Transcript:

(The questions were framed in English, while the responses were received in Tamil)

1. Are you the victim of 1983 riots? If yes, what is your reaction to the riot?

இல்லை. எனது தகப்பனாரும் தமையனாரும் பாதிக்கப்பட்டார்கள்.

2. Why did you give the title, Traitor to the novel?

தமிழில் “ம்” என்றுதான் தலைப்பு வைத்திருந்தேன். ஆங்கிலத்தில் வெளியிட்டபோது பதிப்பாளர்கள் வைத்த தலைப்பே *Traitor*.

3. Why does Nesakumaran want to bomb Urathurai Police Station?

அப்போது போலிஸார் தமிழ்ப் போராளிகளையும் சாதாரண தமிழ் இளைஞர்களையும் வதைத்தும் கொன்றும் தமிழர் விரோத செயல்களை செய்தார்கள். அதற்கா பதிலடியாக போராளி இளைஞர்கள் காவல் நிலையங்களைத் தாக்கினார்கள்.

4. Nesakumaran is taken to Guru Nagar Army Camp. What is done at the camp usually by the army?

1978-ல் பயங்கரவாதத் தடுப்புச் சட்டத்தை நிறைவேற்றிய பின்னர் இலங்கை அரசு தமிழர் பகுதிக்குள் பல இராணுவ முகாம்களை அமைத்தது. அதிலொன்றே குருநகர் இராணுவ

முகாம். அந்த முகாமில் பல தமிழ் இளைஞர்கள் கைது செய்யப்பட்டு தடுத்து வைக்கப்பட்டிருந்தார்கள். அதுவொரு சித்திரவதை முகாம்.

5. Kindly give your views about Annai Iravu Sea Salt Refinery Army Camp.

இந்த முகாம் மிகவும் பழமை வாய்ந்தது. யாழ்ப்பாண குடாநாட்டை இலங்கை பெருநிலப்பரப்பிலிருந்து பிரிக்கும் கேந்திர முக்கியத்துவம் வாய்ந்த இடத்தில் அமைந்திருக்கும் மிகப் பெரிய முகாம்.

6. Give your opinions about Annai Iravu Sea Salt Refinery Army Camp?

சிங்கள இனவெறி இராணுவத்தால் நிறைக்கப்பட்ட ஆக்கிரமிப்பு முகாம்.

7. What do you think of Udugambolla's assassination method of putting a pencil into the ear and hitting it with a hammer?

பென்ஸிலை காதுக்குள் இறக்கி கொல்லும் அநாகரிகம். இப்படி பல சித்திரவதை முறைகள் இலங்கை இராணுவத்திடமுள்ளது.

8. What do you say about this torture method?

இது மனித உரிமை மீறலும் போர்க்குற்றமும்.

9. In the camp, the Tamils narrate Srikanthamalar's torture and murder. Was it the mode of punishment for all the women?

ஆம். இதைவிட கொடிய வதைகளுமிருந்தன. சில பெண்கள் இந்த வதைகளிலிருந்து தப்பித்ததாகவும் செய்திகள் உள்ளன. ஒருவர் எப்படி இராணுவத்துடன் ஒத்துழைக்கிறார் என்பதைப் பொறுத்ததே தண்டனை முறைமைகள்.

10. Traitor is based on the real incidents occurred in two prisons. Give your opinion about Wellikade and Batticaloa prisons.

வெலிகடை வதை முகாம். Batticaloa prisons தமிழர் பகுதியிலிருந்ததால் தமிழ் கைதிகளிற்கு பெரிய பிரச்சினைகள் இருக்கவில்லை.

11. Give your opinion about 1977 and 1981 riots? And what are the reasons for them?

தமிழர்களை இனப்படுகொலை செய்து அடக்கி வைக்க வேண்டும் என்ற இலங்கை அரசின் திட்டமிட்ட வன்முறைகளவை. அமைச்சர்கள் முன்னின்று நடத்திய வன்முறைகள். 1981 வன்முறையில் எங்களது யாழ் நூலகம் 90000 புத்தகங்களோடு போலிசாரால் எரிக்கப்பட்டது.

12. How long were you kept in Wellikade prison?

நான் "MAHARA" சிறையிலேயே 4 மாதங்கள் இருந்தேன். இந்தச் சிறை வெலிகடையிலிருந்து 10 கி.மீ. தொலைவிலுள்ள பெரிய சிறை.

13. "Mendis hit my soldier with his axe" Who is this 'my'?

நேசகுமாரன்.

14. Who is Kanagaratnam Shanmuganathan? What do you think about Shanmuganathan?

இதுவொரு உண்மைச் சம்பவம். யுத்தம் சாமான்யர்களை எப்படி வதைக்கிறது என்பதற்கான துயர எடுத்துக்காட்டு.

15. How did you collect details to write this novel?

படித்தது. சம்பவம் நடந்தபோது சிறையிலிருந்த சிலரோடு உரையாடியது.

16. In pages 146 and 147, you have given the statistics of murders committed by the Sri Lankan Army, Navy, the Special Forces, the LTTE at Chinnagam market, Chettikulam, Mannar, Ariyalai, Velvettithurai, Anuradhapura and Udumbankulam, respectively. Is this statistics true?

அவ்வளவும் உண்மைச் சம்பவங்கள். ஆதாரங்களுண்டு.

17. You were a child soldier. You fought for the Tamils. The LTTE also fought for the Tamils. On the 147th page, you say: "There is no difference between the liberation fighters and the government army".

ஆம். அதைக் காலப் போக்கில் உணர்ந்தேன். விடுதலைப் போராளிகள் அரச இராணுவத்திற்கு குறையாத கொடுமைகளை செய்தார்கள். அப்பாவி தமிழ் - சிங்கள - இஸ்லாமிய மக்களை கொன்றார்கள்.

18. What is your opinion about "The Sinhala people have never been our enemy" (147).

ஆம். சிங்கள இனவாத அரசும் இராணுவமுமே எமது எதிரிகள். சிங்கள மக்கள் எமது சகோதரர்கள்.

19. As mentioned in the novel, are the proceedings and judgments of the court ridiculous in Sri Lanka?

ஆம். அப்படித்தான் எனக்கு நடந்தது.

20. Kindly explain: Even as he is halfway to the courtroom, the sentence of seven years or fourteen years have been announced" (154).

ஆம். நீதித்துறை முழுவதுமாக இனவாதம் புரையோடிப்போயிருந் காலமது.

21. What is E.P.R.L.F group?

சற்றே இடதுசாரித் தன்மை கொண்ட தமிழர் விடுதலை ஆயுத இயக்கம். - Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front.

22. As a native Sri Lankan, you witnessed the war and even participated in it. What could be the solution to this problem?

ஆயுதப் போராட்டம் அழிவுக்கே வழி வகுக்கும். பேச்சுவார்த்தைகள் மூலமே தீர்வை எட்ட முடியும். இந்தியாவில் உள்ளது போன்ற மாநில சுயாட்சியே முறையே தமிழருக்கான தீர்வாக அமையும் எனக் கருதுகின்றேன்.

23. Why is the title *Traitor*? Who is the traitor? Nesakumaran?

ஆம். அவன் துரோகியாகக் கருதப்படுபவன். தன் தோழர்களைக் காட்டிக் கொடுப்பவன்.

24. What do you think of the burning of Jaffna Library?

இனப்படுகொலையின் ஒரு அங்கம் அது. இலங்கை அரசின் காட்டுமிராண்டித்தனம்.

25. You have a wide contact all over the world and familiar with what is happening in Sri Lanka after the war. What is the position of the present government? Have the displaced settled in their native place. Is prevailing there?

இப்போதைய அரசாங்கம் முற்போக்கு பாதையில் நத்தை வேகத்தில் நகருகிறது.

26. According to me, the refugees live in many countries. They have lost everything. Now they are studying and working in their host countries. If they return to Sri Lanka, would they be treated equally and educational and employment be given to them.

இல்லை. அய்ரோப்பிய - கனடா- ஆஸ்திரேலிய அகதிகள் இலங்கை திரும்பமாட்டார்கள். இந்தியாவிலுள்ள அகதிகள் இலங்கை திரும்பக்கூடும்.

27. Is *Traitor* an autobiographical novel?

இல்லை. 'கொரில்லா' வே autobiographical novel.