

TAMILS: A TRANS STATE NATION

What can I do? - Sharing my thoughts with the Tamil Diaspora

by a Tamil Mother, Wife, Daughter and a Refugee in Canada

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Comment by [tamilnation.org](http://www.tamilnation.org) We are privileged to publish this article by a Tamil Mother, Wife, Daughter and a Refugee in Canada. During the many years that [tamilnation.org](http://www.tamilnation.org) has existed we have rarely received a more authentic, touching and moving call for action from a Tamil in the Diaspora to the Tamil Diaspora. We publish here a PDF version of the article as well - because we truly believe that every Tamil in the Diaspora will gain much by returning to read this article from time to time. [The blue underlined words link to relevant pages at www.tamilnation.org and you may need to go to the html version at <http://www.tamilnation.org/diaspora/canada/080128refugee.htm> to view the linked pages]

The [plight of our people](#) has been steadily reaching newer levels of pain and suffering. And, after being an observer with a hands-off approach, I decided to do something about it. I became proactive - in small ways. As a mother of two young children living in Ottawa, Canada and having many commitments, it was not easy to change my inaction - but I did.

I firmly believe now, that if we all do our little part and started working towards a common vision, that vision will and must materialize. I realise there's spiritual element to this as well, and of course some people are skeptical when it comes to these things. But I still wanted share my simple suggestions at the end of this article, with other ordinary people who, like I used to be, are a bit lost when it comes to how they can help.

It all began in 1983 for me. Following the [horrifying experience of the riots](#), I remember the first time my family settled in Jaffna. I remember the 3 day ship journey to Jaffna, the light blue waters of the KKS harbour and the village school where my family was given bread and potato curry. How lovingly the senior students – my people - served the food to us. How good the food tasted, especially after being in a crowded ship for 3 days and having experienced sea sickness.

Children are resilient and if given the chance they bounce back. I soon forgot and overcame the bad memories thanks to my people and Jaffna. I was just a little girl and I was swept away by the simple beauty of my hometown Chavakachcheri – the lush paddy fields, the tall palmyrahs, the mango groves and the hot white sand that made me hop and jump when I tried walking barefoot to the kovil close by.



Green Fields - Painting in oils by Jayalakshmi Satyendra

Jaffna healed me and my horrific memories of the riots. Jaffna saved me in many ways. Jaffna taught me culture, the beauty in living close to nature, the importance of an ecologically sustainable living and embedded in me [deep spiritual beliefs](#).

Then I remember how the war started. Little by little and then all in a rush. The many atrocities that happened. I remember the first time a loved one got killed. I remember a friend who was arrested and disappeared. I remember a childhood acquaintance who was later gang-raped and murdered by Sri Lankan soldiers – became to be known as the [Krishanthi Kumarasamy case](#).



I remember proudly waving at Indian soldiers [only to be terrified of them a few months afterwards](#). What a betrayal by India! But more was to come. I remember how stupidly and naively I voted for Chandrika Kumaratunga when I moved back to Colombo, having just turned 18 and got voting rights, trusting the South to deliver peace as they promised. Instead, [the war intensified under Chandrika's regime](#) and I lost a beloved cousin of mine who had just entered University - her body blown into pieces in one of the many aerial bombings by the Sri Lankan Air Force in the North. How naïve I was in hoping that a Sinhalese government would deliver peace to the Tamil people.

Then, now in a new millennium and in another country, I got sadder and angrier as I read the latest news or heard from people who visited Sri Lanka. I could almost feel [the terror that our people are experiencing on a daily basis](#) - It was almost palpable.

We [cannot trust our enemy one little bit](#) nor should we let them get away with [what they have done to us](#).

Let our fighters carry on with what they are doing but meanwhile, I decided that I need to do my part – in whatever small ways I can.

When we look at the Tamil Diaspora, some of us still lay our hopes on the [International Community](#) - I am not saying it's a bad thing but it should not be the only thing. Some of us wait for some sort of miracle to happen. Some of us feel absolutely hopeless and pessimistic. Some of us feel tortured to live this way – reading the news of our homeland, feeling angry and depressed – then only to get distracted by trivial things in daily life.



Only a rare few Tamils undertake the weight on their shoulders and do more than their part in helping our homeland. They are the dedicated people who though living abroad have not forgotten their duty. These people of the Tamil Diaspora are true leaders and beacons of hope.

However, most of us do nothing. I have friends who simply sigh and change the topic or don't talk about it anymore. Even worse, I have friends who don't even give it a second thought. They like to believe that they have lots of rights in Canada. They thrive in the small things of daily lives and happily chat in English with their kids.

One part of our future generation is being utterly traumatised in Sri Lanka, while the other part (or to be fair, the majority of other part) is growing up oblivious to what's happening to their brethren back home.

So I put together a simple plan on how I (a housewife and a mother) can change my habits, and then I acted on it. It was a very liberating experience for me. Small things can make a big difference. Hence, I share my thoughts with and for the people who might have adopted a “hands-off” approach (like I did before) or “looking the other way” approach.

Act 1 - Get in touch with the North East. Help relatives and friends in North East.

Almost all of my close relatives are living abroad. But I took some trouble to get contact details of distant relatives in Sri Lanka. I contacted my mother's second cousin's family in the North, whom I met only once in my life when I visited them as a child. They were just so happy that I remembered them and called. Now we are in touch at least via mail. I called a long lost relative in Batticaloa. For two decades, the people of the East have experienced the worst of Sinhalese brutality in terms of large scale massacres. This is due to geographical proximity as well other factors which has made them more vulnerable. My relative in Batticaloa was ecstatic that I called. As far as I am concerned, a two way communication was helpful to both parties. I feel connected. Also, sending a small amount of money goes a long way. In these horrific

times, they need all the help that they can get. Initially, I felt ashamed that I didn't contact these people before. But better late than never.

Act 2 - Help the charities that do work in the North East

About 5 years ago, I realised if I can afford to spend \$20 a month on McDonalds, I can sponsor a child. So I sponsored this little girl through Foster Parents Plan. The country they chose was Bangladesh. 5 years on, I still felt so happy of my decision whenever I got a letter or picture from her. So later, I started to donate to the orphanages in Vanni directly through a friend who is personally involved with the orphanages. I allocated a small percentage of my salary for this purpose. I also started contributing in Tamil events and through Tamil organizations using common sense and a bit of trust. In doing so, I brushed aside a long felt concern - "I really need to know how and where my money is going". A quote from one of my favourite writers comes to mind.

"You often say, 'I would give, but only to the deserving'.
The trees in your orchard say not so, nor the flocks in your pasture.
They give that they may live, for to withhold is to perish" – Kalil Gibran

I felt that if we don't give now (our time, money and energy) to our people back at home, our culture and our nationhood might perish eventually. Once I started giving my time, money and energy in small ways, I felt more confident in terms of futures results.

Act 3 - [Boycott Sri Lankan goods](#)

Self explanatory - just check the label of whatever you buy. For example, I stopped buying MD brand that I used to use a lot.

Act 4 - Write to local MPs, NGOs and to the media.

Get details of your local MP and engage them. Write to them regularly or schedule a fact to face meeting so that after a while, they get to know you and a relationship can be formed. I started writing to NGOs and the media, and was amazed at some of the responses that I got. They really like to hear from ordinary people. I feel that I doing my part educating people. This takes maybe 1 or 2 hours of my time per week. And I do believe, if many people start doing this, it could be a powerful factor.

Act 5 - Teach our children [Tamil language](#). Teach them the ancient and recent [history of Tamil homeland](#).

This is a very important point for two reasons. The next generation of children needs to be aware. They will have to carry on the struggle of rebuilding our nation once we are no longer here. Also, teaching our children our language and history is not only beneficial for our people back home, but also [good for our children's self concept, self image and identity](#) (regardless of age).

Act 6 - Don't imagine the worse or NOT try something out because of an assumption.

I have a friend who says with gloom “even if Tamil Eelam materialises it’ll be a bad state. We will destroy ourselves”. Would you give a 10 months old child a can of coke just because “he’s going to be doing that anyway when he is 18” (I actually heard a father say that and I feel sorry for both him and the kid!). This kind of logic is flawed. We can’t give up on things by imagining a bad future. You nurture and nourish a plant so that it’ll be bear good fruits. We’ll just have to heal with love and hope.

Act 7 - Think collectively and truly identify with North East as Tamil Eelam.

We need to think collectively and truly identify with North East as Tamil Eelam. Our thoughts and actions stemming from this identity will have far reaching consequences. Freedom is ours to take - not something that we need to ask from somebody else. Once we start believing in Tamil Eelam, it will materialize. Meanwhile, I feel better when I introduce myself as a “Tamil from the North East of Sri Lanka now referred to as Tamil Eelam by us” – a rather long winded answer to the simple question “where are you originally from?” But I still feel good saying it. I used to say “Sri Lankan”.

Comment by tamilnation.org We can relate to what is said here. We have been there! Nowadays, when asked 'where are you from?', we simply reply that we are from Tamil Eelam. Some do not ask anything more. But many do ask: "So where is that?". We reply "It is in the NorthEast of Sri Lanka." And if they if they go further, we say "It is a defacto state but as you perhaps know, an armed conflict is going on - and the state has not yet received international recognition."

We might have a few dilemmas. For example, we might not have a flag and song that is recognised by others. Recently, the Principal of my daughter’s school had a bright new idea. In order to reflect the cultural diversity at the local school, he wanted to display the different flags of the different nations the children’s families were coming from. It was an extremely nice thought! But I did not feel like giving the Sri Lankan flag nor could I give our flag with the Tiger emblem on it since it may not be perceived as a national flag. I felt really troubled and at the end had to tell the Principal that we didn’t want any representation by flags. So we do have road blocks in this area and we need to work on that but I still rather identify with our unborn nation than to be identified with Sri Lanka - even for formalities. This was an important psychic change.

Act 8 - Positive visualisation

Positive visualisation is not just day dreaming or just hoping, but actually visualising the final goal in mind so that we can work towards it. I have practiced this in my personal life with good results. Once I drew a picture of a goal that I wanted (a seemingly impossible goal at that time), put it in my study room, and every day reflected on it for couple of minutes. This clarified things in my mind. This helped and kept me in focus on what I wanted to achieve and what needs to be done on a daily basis - all the small steps that I had to do in order to achieve this big goal.

Nowadays, I also visualise visiting my hometown (now the home of a big army camp) and see what has to be done from my part in order to achieve this. This last point (positive visualisation) kind of encompasses all of the above points:

Visualise -> Get Proactive -> Act

I visualise my family visiting my mother's cousin's family in Jaffna and having lunch with them. I visualise my kids playing together with theirs! This may seem a bit far fetched but I truly believe that the Universe will respond to my thoughts as well as my actions. I believe we can create our own future if we really want to. We just have to start off this process by being proactive first. The rest will follow.

Some skeptics might call me a dreamer. But I rather dream than despair. I rather believe than be cynical. I rather pray and plead to the Universe, than to turn the other way and pretend everything is fine - as the Tamil saying goes "Prayers that are said for the common good always work". I rather act and consequently feel good about myself for the small yet powerful deeds that I am doing in helping out my people. It's all worth it in the end.