



## Golden Lady endeared with a Golden Shawl

Navajeevanam's Arul Thambyrajah  
celebrates her 100th birthday

Jaffna Diocese



In a gesture symbolic of the love and affection with which Lousia Arul Thambyrajah wife of the late Rev A C Thamb-  
yrajah, the founders of the Navajeevanam Community in Paranthan in the Wannu is widely held, the head of her mother church, the Jaffna Dio-  
cese of the Church of South In-  
dia (JDCSI), the Rt Rev Dr Dan-  
iel Thiagarajah greeted her on  
her 100th birthday morning  
Sunday February 6 endearing  
her with a Golden Shawl.



Following this, he administered the Holy Communion to her and her son Kiruba assisted by the Rev V Pathmathayalan, the priest of the Colombo JDCSI Church.

With family members around, especially her three sons Rev. Sathy, Kiruba and Kulam and their families, Bishop Daniel Thiagarajah and Arul Thambyrajah freely reminisced on the Navajeevanam years and in particular recalled the last anniversary celebrations held, marking the 40th after its founding in 1959. The war years gravely affected Navajeevanam and eventually all activities had to cease.

Bishop Thiagarajah preached at that anniversary celebrations at Navajeevanam's Holy Carpenter Church and his message was based on the community's inspiring motto, "One in Christ – Ready for both: Service and Sacrifice,"

The Wannu has a new challenge and Navajeevanam dedicated to this can play a crucial role, observed Bishop Thiagarajah. His church, the JDCSI is heavily focused on the reconstruction of the Wannu and the resurgence of the people.

"A determined appropriate educational input in the form of a Community College is needed for the Wannu and with our experience in education and health that goes back to several decades, we can do it and Navajeevanam is an ideal place to found such an institution." said Bishop Thiagarajah.

"What better tribute can we pay to the visions of the founders of Navajeevanam," concluded Bishop Thiagarajah.

In the evening a largely attended 100th birthday felicitation service was held at the St Paul's Milagiriya Church at Bambalapitiya.

## Empowerment programmes crucial for grass roots development



Our professionals educated and trained in our educational institutions and universities have migrated in large numbers to the developed countries in search of greener pastures. Many more of them still in Sri Lanka entertain hopes of departing from our island nation sooner or later and their interests and ideas are virtually focused overseas.

People who have gone overseas on scholarships for higher education, chosen so that they could serve our people better, have mostly not returned home. A good example is our Vellore Christian Medical College trained medical personnel and none of them are in Sri Lanka. Even when our mission hospitals are in urgent need of medical personnel, none of them have shown any interest in giving their hands in any form even as short-term volunteers. A person with rich experience of working with children and also in several rural areas in the Wanni where the need is greatest now, Jeyarane Saverimuthu is a multi-skilled person in a variety of crafts and is a leader in her own right. She has been selected to follow a short course in India in this field with special emphasis on costume jewelry.

Jeyarane fully shares and endorses our steadfast view that ours is a wake-up call to all the women that will spark up a movement towards building a new society with socio-economic development ventures from the family forwards and upwards. Mahatma Gandhi believed that in the pursuit of peace and development, India's future was very much dependent on her women folks.



Many elite parents have oriented their children to the feeling and impression that a future for them is only in the West or Down Under. Some of them spend vast fortunes to educate them in international schools that have mushroomed in Colombo and the suburbs and follow educational syllabuses of the countries to which their children plan to migrate.

Sri Lanka's educational programmes are highly formal and hardly in harmony with the needs of a developing country especially to provide for our productive potentials. It is no wonder therefore that in such a situation the public sector of the country is heavily manned by bureaucrats inappreciative of the real development requirements of the grass roots especially in the highly productive farming and fishing sectors. People in these sectors are also often not treated as equals in the class and caste strait-jackets that still prevail in Sri Lanka. Their problems rarely surface in the public forum and their voices hardly heard.

On January 28 a full day seminar was held at the Gandhiji Kiramam Vocational Training Centre for all the students and teachers. A wide variety of programmes that enabled good interpersonal relationships, sharing of views and concerns and bonding among the participants made the day memorable and profitable. They were focused on developing the self-esteem of the participants and stressing the empowering especially of the younger ones to realize and appreciate their ideals, initiative skills and leadership potentials.

Young Rudshita is a victim of the horrendous civil war paralyzed from her hip below. She joined the VTC a year ago and has now become an expert seamstress. She gets orders from a number of retail dress and textile shops and has already earned for herself a good name with her quality products. She is a tremendous source of inspiration to others; a virtual leader despite her tragic handicap.

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Bridal dressing and catering are two other areas our students are excelling and they are very much in demand. As we progress and develop we will explore not only more vocational activities like handyman services, food preservation, pickles, fruit-juice bottling, oil seed-based products, home-based production of wood and leather products, plant nurseries and grafting, the promotion of conservation of our natural resources especially water, tree planting, organic manure and composting techniques but also try to meet the needs of several more areas that demand our involvement in our pursuit of socio-economic development especially in those areas devastated by the war.

Another aspect of our training programme is dairy and poultry development projects. There is a growing interest among our young people in particular to develop poultry and dairy projects at various levels from the backyard barns and home-stead gardens to the small and large farms in various parts where the need is most and such ventures are possible. We also recognize the need to explore the use of biogas as a source of energy especially in the rural areas. Another venture that is drawing our attention very much are herbal and medicinal plant gardens.





We also have to either work with established educational institutions and or provide non-formal educational opportunities on a major scale for meaningful development especially in the areas of farming and fishing. This would include training in electronic communications essential for learning and also for marketing purposes.

Training facilities are being offered to those who are interested in undertaking such ventures at the Jaffna College Institute of Agriculture at Maruthanamadam. Many of the students have already expressed their wish to follow a full time course at the institute once they complete their vocational training.

Involved in this area of vocational training are the production of cow and goat milk, buttermilk, curd and related items, high protein meat and backyard vegetable gardening and the planting of a variety of food trees shrubs and creepers like mango, wood apple, nelli, pomegranate, passion fruit, lemons and limes, jak, custard apple and a host of others.

Furthermore our areas are richly blessed with palmyrah and coconut palms and the variety of products from these lordly palms are incredible without any waste from them. The Palmyrah Project named after this unique palm is often referred to as Katpakavritcham, the tree of the heavens. It stands tall, strong and is generous to humanity, an ideal that inspires us very much

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## Bishop Thiagarajah visits his island home



Delft, the outermost island of Sri Lanka almost halfway between the northern and southern coasts of Sri Lanka and India respectively was the home of Bishop Daniel and Thaya Thiagarajah from 1983 to 1987. They were then Rev and Mrs Thiagarajah charged with the parish incumbency of the JDCSI Church there.

During that time they endeared themselves to the community irrespective of the religious backgrounds and even adopted as dear and near to them many young people who sought their care, love and affection; many such were not even members of their church when they started their ministry in Delft.





The affection with which Bishop Thiagarajah and his family are held in Delft was joyously evident when he made a 2-day visit February 11 and 12. He was welcomed most warmly by Christians, both Catholic and Protestant and Hindus as if he belonged to them all. He was, to them, their own who had come home to visit his large island family. On Sunday he celebrated Holy Communion assisted by the resident priest, the Rev Thaveedhu during which four children and an adult were baptized and four candidates were confirmed as full members of the church. The Reverends Rajkumar and Thayalini Thiagarajah who accompanied the Bishop read the lessons.

In a soul-rousing sermon, Bishop Thiagarajah demanded that we retain the saltiness of the salt, hold the lamp of our faith aloft and shining and our deeds must be an example for the good of humanity. We cannot lose any of them.

Delft is widely known as the island of ponies first brought there by the Dutch and they graze in freedom along with the local cattle. One travels a rather rough stretch of waters to Delft crossing an area where several undersea currents intersect.



## Amazing joy visiting my peers in Jaffna

A Sri Lankan-Aussie teenager recounts her visit to her parents' homeland  
By Edwina Vijeyaratnam, Melbourne



We have visited Sri Lanka several times but have never visited Jaffna. We have heard from our parents, and grandparents and relatives about the war in Sri Lanka, but we were least concerned. We look at Sri Lanka, as a perfect place to spend our holidays, visiting beautiful beaches, the hill country, the tropical weather and lovely scenic villages and small towns and plenty of sea food and lobsters to delight our epicurean taste buds.

After the end of war in Sri Lanka in 2008 my parents decided to visit our relatives and parents' homes in Uduvil and Chunnakam.

We commenced our trip to Sri Lanka last week of November 2010, arriving in Colombo and attending worship services at the C.S.I Church in Wellawatte, where we met Bishop Daniel Thiagarajah and his family who made arrangements for our trip to Jaffna and stay in Vaddukodai. After a fortnight in India we returned to Colombo on 9 December. Two days later our Bishop accompanied us to Jaffna. We drove to Jaffna by coach. We arrived in Vavunia at 7.30 in the evening.

Our grandparents' spiritual daughter the Rev Thayalini Thiagarajah met us at Vavunia. She is presently a minister at Cheddikulam. We rested for an hour and proceed to Jaffna by road. The roads were muddy, in poor condition forcing the driver to drive to a jumpy-wriggly snail pace most of the distance at less than 30 km per hour.

Most of the houses, buildings and trees were either destroyed or in ruins, many coconut and palmyrah palms stood forlornly beheaded, and paddy fields uncultivated and neglected. I realised what amount of destruction war could do on human kind. Mum showed me the damaged church in Kilinochchi where my Grandma Rev Angela Tampiyappa served. I am happy to hear it has been repaired and re-dedicated.

We reached Vaddukodai at 2.00 am passing several army check points and camps. The journey was very tiresome. We were guests of our Bishop Daniel and Dr Thaya Thiagarajah. Thaya aunty is my grandma's cousin, who made all the arrangements for our stay in Jaffna.

We visited our maternal and paternal grandparents' homes in Uduvil and Chunnakam; visited our relatives too. The Uduvil Church minister the Rev Rajkumar took us to Uduvil Girls College and around the church, where my mum and her sister studied. We met the principal Mrs Cherry Mills and had evening tea with her and she took us around the school. Mum mentioned because of the war the building of the church was not in a good condition. All the roads and street in the towns were crowded. Unlike in Colombo cars are fewer and more bicycles in Jaffna. The army personal were cordial and welcomed us warmly.

Living in luxury in a developed country and visiting Jaffna made me sad. We visited the Eliyathamby Girls Home in Uduvil and met both Uduvil and Pandatteruppu Girls Home children there.

Visiting this home was one of the most amazing and eye-opening experience in my life.

Although the war had directly affected the girls, it was their smiles that never left their faces the whole time we were there. Sharing with us their personal experiences of the war through song, dance and dramas, I was struck by the amount of damage war can do.

When one is watching on TV in a safe country with no worries whatever, it is easy to dismiss and say 'It doesn't concern me.' Watching the girls the same as yourself, who has lost everything provides you with a different conclusion.

My two sisters and I along with our parents participated at a Christmas entertainment by the girl's homes of Uduvil and Pandatteruppu. Since we sisters could speak Tamil we were able to talk to all the girls.

Presenting the girls with Christmas gifts, it turned to be one of the most amazing things I have taken part in. To see the smiles on their faces when receiving the gifts packages made me feel truly blessed to be have this opportunity from God. Playing games with them later only further proved it more.

Along with our parents we participated at a Christmas lunch hosted by our parents for the children and staff of both girls homes. The girls invited me and my sisters to sit with them for lunch and we were so happy to have the meals with them.

When it was time to go, we felt sad to leave my new friends, my sisters behind. We only left with the promise that we could come back again later that week. We visited them again that week and spent some time with them and played cricket and took some photos. Playing with them and sharing our love with those lovely girls made us happy. I thank God that these new sisters of ours are now in safe hands of the JDCSI.

The human bonds we create so lovingly has no parallel in the joy it evokes. Jaffna was definitely the highlight of my Sri Lankan trip. To say that I came back as a person with a changed attitude towards my motherland is an understatement. I am forever grateful for this opportunity and feel truly blessed that I was able to take part in it.

## Navajeevanam must arise but as a Community College.

By Christie Richards



(Wishing Mrs Arul Thambirajah the best of wishes on her 100th birthday, the author prays for her good health and the wish that on her 101st birthday she will open the Navajeevanam Community College as a gift to the people of the Wannu managed by the church to which she belongs, the Jaffna Diocese of the Church of South India.)

A vision must have a perpetual flow like a river; it is like an unending marathon relay of laps. As its ideals are pursued and achieved, they must generate new visions keeping with the demands of the time. This process has no end but a great deal of achievements along the way.

There may be several obstacles and challenges, some of them very severe even to the level of total collapse but visions hatched with commitment and dedication to serve needs should not be forsaken neither they be contained and trapped into tight and limited circumstances.

A good idea must grow and if necessary reorganized and reconstructed if such are required. The Wannu Civil War that lasted over thirty years has caused total devastation.

Among those that suffered was Navajeevanam (New Life), a courageous agriculture-based project founded in 1959 by a few dedicated people, the Rev and Mrs Thambirajah of the Jaffna Diocese of the Church of South India (JDCSI), Sister Elizabeth Baker of the Methodist Church and a few friends. The Thambirajahs and Sister Baker became the resident governing members of Navajeevanam and in time the sole leaders until two of the Thambirajah children became actively involved in its management.

Navajeevanam, from the beginning became a residential facility for needy young children and all their requirements were met including schooling just like in a family. They were further trained in agricultural systems and technology appropriate to their needs. As a matter of fact it functioned as an out of campus educational institution providing the kind of education vital for the development of a region like the Wannu apart from being a place that inculcated Christian values.



It was a tough task the Thambirajahs and Miss Baker had undertaken and what they achieved is highly commendable. They stayed close to their Mother Churches, the JDCSI and the Methodist Church respectively and very often Navajeevanam was a retreat centre for the workers of these churches including the Anglican Church. The late Bishops Sabapathy Kulandran and Lakshman Wickremasinghe sought Navajeevanam for their quiet meditations, retreats and inspiration.

As has been with every institution, homes, factories and farms, Navajeevanam too suffered considerable damage during the war including the Church of the Holy Carpenter for which the foundation stone was laid by Bishop Sabapathy Kulandtan.

At the 40th anniversary celebrations of Navajeevanam, Bishop Daniel Thiagarajah, then a priest of the JDCSI in the Wannu preached the sermon on the Navajeevanam theme "One in Christ -Ready for both: Service and Sacrifice;" And that was probably the last landmark celebrations Navajeevanam had before the trail of destruction became acute in the Wannu. So fierce was the civil war, there was nothing any one could have done at that time to save it.

It was left to Mrs Arul Thambirajah to hold on in great faith and with children in her charge survive the horrendous war. However, every physical structure of Navajeevanam was totally destroyed.

This does not mean the Navajeevanam vision has faded and disappeared into oblivion. It will certainly not be God's way.

Navajeevanam awaits a new future commitment and for which the vision is becoming clearer and meaningful. We have to take the baton and commence a new lap.

Right on the heels of the war's end the JDCSI addressed itself with immense determination to countless numbers of problems the Wannu faced for its recovery and reconstruction. With over hundred thousand children and young people traumatized most of them severely and hundreds of women widowed, the JDCSI set up the Centre for Holistic Healing at the Manipay Green Memorial Hospital with a branch in Kilinochchi and the Women's Empowerment Programme widening the earlier Palmyrah Project and its scope. Leadership Seminars are being planned during the next few months and all these will be ongoing projects.

Among the many felt needs, the principal one is a skilled training centre in agriculture, appropriate technology and courses needed to enable young people to be trained and educated to lead their people in their resurgence.

There is therefore a great need for a Community College that will cater to these needs and Navajeevanam is the ideal place to set up such an institution. It should function as a fully fledged Community College of the JDCSI and provide among others, facilities for students of Jaffna College and Uduvil Girls College if they wish to take community development disciplines along with their formal education.

Community Colleges are necessary for developing countries and it will be a great tribute to the founders of Navajeevanam if it becomes a pioneer in this area in Sri Lanka.

## Our women power on the rise

History is liberally laced with examples and instances of individuals, communities and nations that have risen from the debris of disasters, grown in strength and confidence and towered as sentinels defying all kinds of odds. This is possible when we seek our survival as a force determined to recover from whatever that may have brought destruction and devastation to us.

We cannot, and ought not to run away when we are faced with challenges with the option to seek the easy or better defined, the cowardice way out. If this matters, for the individual suicide is the extreme form of escape. A community is deprived when its members take the que sera sera attitude and resign themselves to whatever will be will be philosophy of inaction. They bury their talents to rot. A community is also affected when social divisions discriminate one against the other. For instance, the highly productive Wannu folks are reckoned as outside the social ambit of the materially oriented consumer class of elite city dwellers

A nation suffers when communities most affected by various factors like racism, religious egotisms and other forms of discrimination migrate to other lands in search of better conditions of life. They are dictated by their consumerist inclinations. Faulty educational systems have weaned them out of their creative talents. None of these escape routes will offer the solutions we seek for communities of our people, some totally affected but nearly all suffering the

devastation of the horrendous thirty years civil war, the consequences of which can never be fully gauged at the present moment; may be ever.

There have been many suicides of individuals unable to cope with whatever that has affected them. Families have moved away from their villages and towns to other areas virtually disowning their own folks. Worse still, overseas migration has denied us of professionals and able-bodied people.

The resultant factor of this devastation is deprivation of assets both human and material necessary for our recovery. However, all is not lost.

In such a circumstance our survival instincts are germinated even more forcefully and such have been the realities in history with peoples, communities and nations. Time and again, one can recognize how women power rises as an answer to the demands for recovery.

Our elite who have displaced themselves from our communities may ignore our needs and our Diaspora may not want to know us anymore as they metamorphose in the developed world but our women folk true to their nature will rise and seek a new world for our people.

We already see signs of the leadership they can offer. . Great leaders have seen this unique nature of women which is a natural habit of the females of the lower species of life too Mahatma Gandhi publicly acknowledged that the future of India was very much dependent on women.

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