

## 10. 100 Influential Sri Lankan Tamils of the 20th Century

The Fall 1990 issue of the *Life* magazine (vol.13, no.12) presented a list of 100 most important Americans of the 20th century. In introducing this list, the compilers noted, "The people we are calling important are not necessarily great - in fact, a couple might be on your list of villains. Rather, their importance is measured by their influence. How would our lives have been different had these people not lived?". This list included some of my idols; Muhammad Ali, Marlon Brando, Albert Einstein, Alfred Kinsey and Margaret Mead.

The first sentence of the introduction to this *Life*'s compilation stated, "as the end of this century looms, *Life* takes a look at the people who have made it what it is". This list provided an inspiration for me to prepare my list of 100 influential Sri Lankan Tamils of the 20th century. The *Life* magazine enlisted the services of 60 experts from diverse disciplines, who contributed 636 names initially, which were then pruned to 100 for the final list. However, I prepared my list on my own, without consulting anyone. My selection criteria for inclusion were as follows:

- 1 The person should have 'influenced the minds and events' in a general sense, in Sri Lanka and/or other countries.
- 2 He (or she) need not have necessarily born in this century. Those who were born in the 19th century were included if their influence was deeply felt in this century. e.g.: Pon. Ramanathan, Pon. Arunachalam and Ananda Coomaraswamy.
- 3 He (or she) should have been born in Sri Lanka, though exerting his or her influence predominantly beyond the borders of Sri Lanka. e.g: MGR (in India) and Sinnathamby Rajaratnam (in Singapore).
- 4 He (or she) could have been born elsewhere, but inducted as a naturalized citizen of Sri Lanka. e.g: S.Thondaman.
- 5 Either both or one of the parents be Tamils by birth. e.g: Ananda Coomaraswamy and Richard de Zoysa.
- 6 Muslims (being Tamil speaking) can be included, if they have 'influenced the minds and events'.
- 7 To eliminate the bias of chronological proximity, as far as possible the nominees would have already died. But this should

not preclude the inclusion of living persons who have exerted tremendous influence on 'minds and events'. e.g: Prabhakaran.

I am sure that quite a number of the names in my list will raise some eyebrows, initiate discussion and even debate. It cannot be helped. Even the *Life* magazine observed that only three names were agreed by everybody who contributed to the compilation of its list. These were that of Henry Ford and the Wright Brothers. I have no doubt that everybody who reads my list will agree with at least three names; G.G.Ponnambalam, S.J.V.Chelvanayakam and V.Prabhakaran. If readers will take a paper and start jotting their selections for the remaining 97 slots after reading my list, I would feel satisfied that my purpose in compiling this list would have been served.

For convenience, I have listed the names under different categories, and in approximate chronological order of birth.

### **Legislators**

Sir Pon. Ramanathan. C.Suntheralingam, S.J.V.Chelvanayakam, G.G.Ponnambalam, S.Thondaman, Sinnathamby Rajaratnam, M.G.Ramachandran, C.Vanniasingham, M.Sivasithamparam and A.Amirthalingam.

### **Social activists**

Sir Pon. Arunachalam, K. Natesa Aiyar, S.Nadesan, K.C.Nithiananda, K.Kanthasamy, A.Kodeeswaran, Dr. S.Rajasundaram (Gandhian movement), K.Uma Maheswaran, S. Yogachandran (Kuttimani) and V. Prabhakaran.

### **Administrators**

Justice C.Nagalingam, Sir Kanthiah Vaithianathan, Justice P.Sriskantharajah, Justice S.Sivasubramaniam, K.Alvapillai, Dr. H.W.Tambiah, C.Balasingham, M.Srikantha, Shiva Pasupathi and R.Sunderalingam.

### **Natural Scientists**

Prof. A.W.Mailvaganam, Prof. M.U.Sultan Bawa, Prof. C.J.Elizer, Dr. M.A.V.Devanathan, Prof. C.Sivagnanasundaram, Prof. K.D.Arudpragasam, Prof R.S.Ramakrishna, Prof.A.Thuraiarajah, Prof. M.Sundaralingam and Dr.P.Sivapalan.

### **Social Scientists**

Dr. James T.Rutnam, Prof.K.Kularatnam, Prof.G.G.Tambiahpillai, Prof.A.Jeyaratnam Wilson, Prof.S.J.Tambiah, Prof.S.Arasaratnam, Dr.S.Thananjayarajasingham, Prof. K.Kailasapathy, Prof. K.Indrapala and Prof.K.Sivathamby.

### **Literati**

Ananda K.Coomaraswamy, Swami Vipulananda, C.V.Velupillai, Prof.K.Kanapathipillai, Prof.S.Vithiananthan, Dr. A.M.A.Azeez, S.Tambimuttu, Mahakavi S.Ruthiramoorthy, S.Ponnudurai and Dominic Jeeva.

### **Educators**

Handy Perinbanayagam, S.Shivapathasundaram, Fr.S.Thaninayagam, Orator C.Subramaniam, S.V.O.Somanader, Prof.A.A.Hoover, Pundit K.P.Ratnam, Pundit Thangamma Appakuddy, Dr. Siva Chinnathamby and Dr. Rajani Thiranagama.

### **Entrepreneurs**

C.Loganathan, K.C.Thangarajah, S.Rajendram, S.Sellamuthu, A.Y.S.Gnanam, K.Gunaratnam, Jabir A.Cader, V.S.Thurairajah, R.Maharajah and R.Rajamahendran.

### **Artistes**

Kalai Arasu Chornalingam, Inuvil Thatchinamoorthy, Alaveddi N.K.Pathmanathan, N.Shanmugaratnam, Kamala Johnpillai, Yaalpanam T.Ratnam, Balu Mahendra, Master Sivalingam, K.Balendra and Richard de Zoysa.

### **Commentators/Journalists**

S.J.K.Crowther, Reggie Michael, S.P.Amarasingam, S.Sivagnanasundaram, S.Sivanayagam and Dr.Neelam Thiruchelvam.

### **Sportsmen**

M.Sathasivam, M.J.M.Lafir, N.Ethirveerasingham and V.S.Kumar Anandan.