

“Sri Lanka Matha”: A Matter of Translation

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Introduction

Exotic greenery, blue waters, and sundry wildlife to the treasure trove of ancient monuments, the island nation of Sri Lanka is nothing short of magnificent. The native inhabitants descended from Stone Age hunter-gatherers to a populace of approximately Twenty-one million; an ideal fusion of ethnicities, religions, and cultures reside within the territorial boundaries. The rich diversity reflected in almost all the spheres of the island is an accouterment to the allure of the land. Yudhanjaya Wijeratne, Sri Lankan Science fiction writer, best known for *Numbercaste* and *The Inhuman Race*, portrays a mosaic of the island as follows:

Sri Lanka is a beautiful little island nation parked perilously closed to India; a little too hot, a little too humid, and perhaps too expensive, but to its credit are fantastic beaches, strangely melancholy hills, and the ruins of kingdoms past.
(Wijeratne, year)

The unveiled quota of archaeological, historical, and linguistic evidence do reinforce the argument that a migratory wave of population from different regions of India initiated human civilizations in Sri Lanka. “Sinhalese oral histories about the peopling of Sri Lanka suggest that North Indian ruling castes migrated to Sri Lanka around the Sixth century BCE and that was the origin of Sinhalese speakers in Sri Lanka”, Samanti Kulatilake corroborates the verity (431). In contrast, there are two distinctive Tamil communities in Sri Lanka as Ceylon Tamils, and Indian Tamils, whose dissimilarities emanated from their advent to the island — Ceylon Tamils residing in the Northern regions of the island are presumed to be the lineage of South Indian immigrant descendants whilst Indian Tamils represent the indentured labour brought to the island by the British in the wake of the plantation economy.

Sinhalese and Tamils communities had co- inhabited the island since times known to humankind. Although the communities have their own demographic, cultural, and societal polarities, their linguistic affiliations have become a controversial quandary. In

Sri Lanka, Sinhalese and Tamil are constitutionally accepted as the official languages and English as the lingua franca. Chapter IV of the constitution of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka titled 'Language' states:

Official Language. 18. (1) The Official Language of Sri Lanka shall be Sinhala.

(2) Tamil shall also be an official language.¹

(3) English shall be the link language.

National Languages. 19. The National Languages of Sri Lanka shall be Sinhala and Tamil. (10)

Furthermore, in the use of National Languages in Parliament, Provincial councils, and local authorities, the constitution declares that any member of the above institutions is entitled to perform his duties and discharge his functions in either of the National Languages. The Medium of instruction in all levels of education –including that of primary, secondary, and tertiary education of Sri Lanka should be conducted in any of the two national languages. Language of administration, legislation, and courts should also be of either language, and the documentation should be maintained as they deem appropriate. For instance, section 2 of article 23 proclaims:

All orders, proclamations, rules, by-laws, regulations, and notifications made or issued under any written law other than those made or issued by a Provincial Council or a Local Authority and the Gazette shall be published in Sinhala and Tamil together with a translation thereof in English. (13)

Perhaps more than any other attribute, the ability to use a language distinguishes humans from other animals. Language allows a humans to communicate their innermost thoughts in a constructive way to interact with one another. Human emotions ranging from joy to despair are expressed via language. "Language, a system of conventional spoken, manual (signed), or written symbols by means of which human beings, as members of a social group and participants of its culture, express themselves. The functions of language include communication, the expression of identity, play, imaginative expression, and emotional release" (Robins, year). As

¹ Aided by section 2(b) of the thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution.

evident through the interpretation mentioned above, Language reflects the identity and characteristics of an individual as of the inherent features of their community. As a result, language has become a formidable power of its own, hegemonizing the masses.

As Bourdieu (1977) notes:

The values ascribed to speech cannot be understood apart from the person who speaks, and the person who speaks cannot be understood apart from larger networks of social relationships. Every time we speak, we are negotiating and renegotiating our sense of self in relation to the larger social world, and reorganizing that relationship across time and space. Our gender, race, class, ethnicity, sexual orientation, among many other characteristics, are all implicated in this negotiation of identity. (Hornberger & Mackey, year)

The language and identity of an individual are mutually inclusive; from sophisticated professional employees to shanty dwellers, glitzy crowds, school-goers, and tourists – the characteristics of the respective group’s identity are reflected in that specific group’s language. The works of the New York conceptual artist Nikki S. Lee illustrate the fundamental human ability to consciously transform one’s self. Her projects reveal the variability of individual identity: simple changes of language and outfits could wholly transmute the identity of a person (Amberg & Vause). Nonetheless, the language acquired via the physical and human environment a human hails from remains firm in all contexts.

Hence, the language of the National Anthem of Sri Lanka, a solemn patriotic song unanimously accepted by the nation as an expression of identity, is of utmost significance. A national anthem is a controversial phenomenon because of the power it yields over the masses and the rejuvenation it flocks on the human spirit. “The national anthem, like a flag or national emblem, is a symbol of the nation-state. Far from being static or monologic in its meaning, the anthem, like most symbols, carries a range of diverse, often conflicting meanings that are integral aspects of specific materials and social situations” (Guy). The anthem holds supplementary meaning far beyond the script and music notations. Each lyric, stanza, or even the words themselves have a myriad of interpretive meanings and associations for different

members of society. In their exploratory research, AviGilboa and Ehud Bodner observe that when exposed to the national anthem of their native country, “people react with feelings of pride and patriotism and that the anthem has the power to unite people around similar associations” (Cameron, year).

In the Sri Lankan context, the invincible sense of kith and kin to each of our own, as the national anthem lyric “a mighty nation marching onward, all as one” suggests, is paramount at the advent of a novel decade, after a bygone era of mending and ending hostilities. The need to make amends for wrongdoings of threedecades of elongated violence and atrocity from both parties could commence with the acceptance of the other- acknowledging their identity. In this sense, National Anthem, essentially the bilingual version, is a primary source of critical awareness and acceptance generation and is closely linked with the inclusion of previously hostile ethnic communities.

As of the constitutional status granted to the National languages of Sri Lanka, the constitution recognizes the National anthem. Clause 7 of the constitution states that “The National Anthem of the Republic of Sri Lanka shall be ‘Sri Lanka Matha’, the words and music which are set out in the third schedule” (2). Both the Sinhalese version composed by the renowned lyricist Ananda Samarakoon and its’ equivalent translation in Tamil by award-winning Tamil poet Pandit M. Nallathambi as ‘NamoNamoThaye’ was acknowledged in the very first Independence Day celebration of Ceylon, which featured both of these patriotic songs. It was only in 1951 that “NamoNamoMatha” was officially adopted as our country's National Anthem. The opening lyric “NamoNamoMatha” led to a great tragedy; the assassination of Premier Bandaranaike and the resultant turmoil was regarded as a cause of the ill-fated composition of the national anthem. Therefore, the opening line ‘NamoNamoMatha’ was officially changed to ‘Sri Lanka Matha’ in 1961. The grief-stricken Samarakoon committed suicide distressed by the mutilation of his beloved creation without his consent. “Such is the tragic history of our current national anthem,” opines Ginige (2).

The Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission (LLRC), which was a commission of inquiry mandated to investigate the state of affairs which led to the foundering of the ceasefire agreement, the lessons that should be learned, measures to intercept future developments of such nature as well as recommendations for

initiating peace, harmony and ultimately reconciliation, in chapter eight reflects upon the dispute of ‘National Anthem’,

8.291 Several views were expressed concerning the use of the National Anthem as a unifying factor, and in bringing about greater understanding among the communities. One view was that it would be advisable to reflect the two national languages policy by symbolically introducing at least two lines in Tamil to the national Anthem.² It was pointed out that this would be a major step towards healing the wounds of the heart.

8.292 According to another view the National Anthem should be sung in both languages. It was stated in this connection that in 1951 the National Anthem was officially accepted and from that day the National Anthem was also sung in Tamil and there was no necessity for change at this stage.³(321)

Thus, the acceptance of the bilingual versions became a topic of much debate and debacle, as singing National Anthem in mother tongue became an articulate response to the very victories, tensions, and traumas of post-conflict independent Sri Lanka. The country saw the pinnacle of antipathy over the National Anthem during the 72nd Independence Day celebration held recently. The decision of the government to sing National Anthem only in Sinhalese, disregarding its Tamil translation, led to a massive outcry of protests and dissents in the Northern and Eastern provinces of Sri Lanka, homeland to the majority of Tamil residents.

Hence the present study examines the perspectives on accepting both the Sinhalese version and Tamil translation of the National Anthem and whether it leads to social inclusivity in our society. The existing predicament requires an immediate consideration either by assuming the bilingual narration or a potential tailor-made resolution appropriate to the national anthem of Sri Lanka and the multi-ethnic communities to forge an inclusive and accommodative future.

²Mr. Srilal Perera before the LLRC at Colombo on 25th November 2010.

³ Mr. Amara Hewa Madduma before the LLRC at Colombo on 20th January 2011.

Methodology

As indicated above, there is a desideratum to identify the perspectives on the bilingual narration of the National Anthem in pursuit of social inclusivity and accepting the identities of ethnic others. Since the research explores perspectives ingrained in clan and folk, the investigation requires an in-depth examination of the subjects in consideration. Hence, the present study is based on data garnered through a mixed-method approach. A combination of questionnaires distributed amongst undergraduates of State Universities of Sri Lanka and unstructured telephonic interviews conducted with a selected faction of the participants were employed. The undergraduates represent a selective dimension of the society with a sound awareness of the research problem, as they are more exposed to the conflicting socio-political situations prevailing within the communities. Thus fifty questionnaires evenly distributed amongst undergraduates whose Mother tongue is Sinhalese and Tamil reading for their Bachelor's degree in the University of Kelaniya and the University of Jaffna merged with informal conversations conducted afterward with a selected ten participants were the primary methods of investigation. At the same time, secondary sources of publications, internet articles on the research topic were considered to augment the outcome of the primary sources. The garnered data were analyzed under descriptive statistics to succinctly discern the stances of the target group relevant to the research problem.

Results

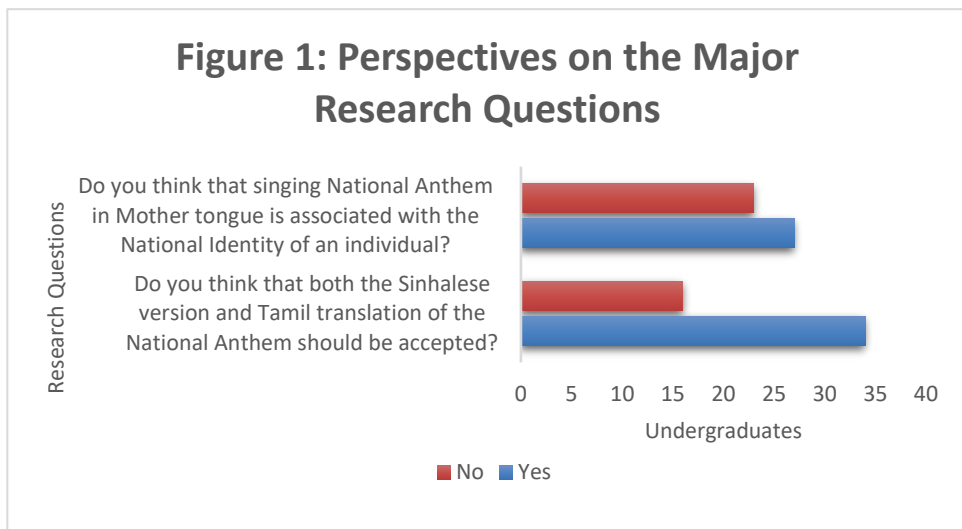


Table 1: Perspectives on the Primary Research Questions based on the Mother tongue of the target group.

	Undergraduates whose Mother tongue is Sinhalese	Undergraduates whose Mother tongue is Tamil
I think that both the Sinhalese version and Tamil translation of the National Anthem should be accepted.	09	25
I do not think that both the Sinhalese version and Tamil translation of the National Anthem should be accepted.	16	-
I think that singing National Anthem in Mother tongue is associated with the National Identity of an individual.	04	23
I do not think that singing National Anthem in Mother tongue is associated with the National Identity of an individual.	21	02

Figure 1 indicates the two primary research questions under which the sub-questions were lined in the questionnaire. As shown in figure 1, of 50 undergraduates, 34 reckon that both versions of the National Anthem should be acknowledged, and a noticeable feature there, as distinctly pinpointed in table 1, is that, whilst all 25 undergraduates whose Mother tongue is Tamil acceded to the sentiment, only 09 undergraduates whose Mother tongue is Sinhalese agreed. Under the question mentioned above, the reasons behind the acceptance or rejection were queried within the questionnaire and during the informal conversations. The majority of the nine Sinhalese mother tongue speakers who welcomed the two versions stated that, as the national anthem is a common denominator to all, it should be fair to all communities — Hence they approve both versions. Two of the undergraduates of the above group mentioned that as the national anthem is a representation of the whole country, the anthem should be sung in the national languages of the country. Of the 25

undergraduates that proclaimed Sinhalese and Tamil translation of the National anthem should be accepted, myriad rationales were produced. Nearly all of them did vocalize that as Tamil is their first language, through which they speak, were educated, and are employed, their whole lives have been intricately woven and inextricably entangled with the language. Hence not allowing the nation's anthem to be sung in their first language had left them feeling marginalized and polarized. Therefore, they remarked that both versions of the national anthem should be accepted. Further, the Tamil mother tongue speaking undergraduates did declare that singing the national anthem in their first language makes them feel as they belong to this nation, which is a sentiment not shared by a majority of the populace about their community during the past decades.

Out of the fifty participants, sixteen of the Sinhalese mother tongue speakers pronounced that twain versions of the national anthem are not a necessity. The reasons include: Tamil being relatively a small demography of the populace of the country, the Tamils being constrained to specific cartography, the original version of the national anthem been written in Sinhalese well as one of the participants highlighted that Sri Lanka belongs to Sinhalese as they are the descendants of native inhabitants of the country whereas Tamils migrated to the island from the neighboring state India. A recurrent impetus was that, as Tamils are a minority of the country, a separate anthem is not required. Furthermore, if the participants' perspective articulates the acceptance of the bilingual versions, whether both versions should be employed simultaneously in all state events or appropriate to the relevant instances is queried. In addendum, whether the Tamil translation or the Tamil version should be limited to Northern and Eastern provinces as the tradition prevailed in Sri Lanka prior to the prohibition of the Tamil version in 2010 was also questioned. The 25 Tamil speakers surmised that the Tamil translation of the National Anthem should be used in all state functions alike, alongside the Sinhalese version. A significant factor that could be discerned is that, although nine of the Sinhalese undergraduates were willing to accept the bilingual narration of the national anthem, four of the nine contributors prefer Tamil translation of the national anthem to be limited to Northern and Eastern provinces of the country as of the prior practice existed within the country.

Twenty–seven undergraduates believe that the language of the National Anthem and social identity are correlated whilst the rest do not consider them as inter-related concepts. Among the 27 undergraduates, only four are Sinhalese first language undergrads whereas 23 out of 25 Tamil first language speakers who answered the questionnaire accepted that singing the Tamil translation of the National Anthem and their individual identity is of utmost importance in social inclusion are relevant (Table 1). As indicated in the table, it is evident that most of the Sinhalese first language speakers do not allocate much value to the language of the National Anthem and social identity. Under the research question, feelings and emotions evoked through the narration of the National Anthem in their language are questioned in order to depict the undergraduates’ attitudes regarding the matter. Whether it makes them feel valued or as a member of the community is queried. Here also, 23 out of the 25 undergraduates whose Mother tongue is Tamil consider singing the National Anthem in their own language as a profound occurrence as it intensifies their feelings of belonging, which were lost during the times of civil conflict. A notable fact is that two of the Tamil mother tongue speakers mentioning that singing the national anthem in their first language and identity are not related. The reason indicated was that the national anthem is only a small matter when considering the larger picture of the island where a positive understanding doesn’t exist between the Sinhalese and Tamil communities.

The twenty-one Sinhalese –speakers with the stance of national anthem and identity being not related adhered the outlook to the following reasons: lack of effective communication, absence of an efficacious conflict resolution, Blame- game; condemning ordinary Tamil citizens for the sufferings of the three-decade long civil war, superior mentality and inability to accept and embrace changes.

Discussion

“A National Anthem has the power to unite or divide a nation. The Anthem represents the country’s values, its principles and motives. For example, Austria and Canada changed the lyrics of their National Anthem to make them more gender inclusive” (Weeratunga, year). For the country to move forward to achieve reconciliation, citizenry: every member of the communities should feel represented. As for the lyric ‘we are children of one mother’, a united front could only be generated through equal

rendition. Thus, the bilingual narration of the national anthem is rather paramount to conquer the existing quandary.

The results mentioned above undoubtedly portray that the Tamil-speaking faction of the society feels marginalized by the language issue of the National Anthem, which they believe is clearly connected to their identity and social inclusion. One of the most remarkable facts out of the analyzed data is that most of the Sinhalese-speaking undergraduates of the target group do not share this sentiment related to the issue of the language of the National Anthem. As undergraduates of state universities who have reached a possible level of education, the target group is acquainted with the dynamics existing between the communities of the society. On the other hand, the participants are astute and intuitive enough to realize a future Sri Lanka, based on the experiences and recollections of the past and present. Therefore, the answers of the Sinhalese speakers are suggestive of the superior mentality they have adopted as the majority, creating inevitable marginalization. This ethnic polarization hinders inclusivity, “the practice or policy of including people who might otherwise be excluded or marginalized, such as those members of minority groups” (Marknovi, year).

The garnered data portray a few key findings: the lack of positive understanding between the communities. Dr. Seyd Hussain Shaheed Soherwordi, in his research titled ‘Construction of Tamil and Sinhalese Identities in Contemporary Sri Lanka’, states that the period of colonization of Sri Lanka, 1796- 1833, was pivotal in encouraging the processes which would come to form Sinhalese and Tamil ethnic identities. He further observes that until the British's administration centralization of Sri Lanka in 1833, the existence of these two separate entities was one of mutual exclusiveness as there existed a clear historical divide between Tamils and Sinhalese. He argues that the historical divide in the last few centuries has developed into a modern divide of these ethnic groups into conflict and heightened national rhetoric (Soherwordi). The civil war, which culminated in 2009, saw a rising of nationalism casting a black shadow over the ethnic groups with minority populations. The nationalistic perspective presumed the other to be villains through a narrative of victimization by a grand plan perpetrated by the Tamils, which plunged the nation into anxiety, mistrust and political, ethnic and cultural chaos.

On the other hand, Tamils, aided by the entities located in the Lankan soils and abroad, alleged the Sinhalese populace for misgivings they suffered throughout their lives. Hence the constant accusations and implications ensued a lack of awareness and insight, leading to a stark disregard of the other. The above findings succinctly portray the misapprehension of one community towards the other.

Further, the results elucidate the absence of effective communication and rapport between the communities. The disinterest, aloofness, and detachment demonstrated by the Sinhalese –speaking undergraduates is proof of the lack of idea interchange, opinions, and sentiments. One of the basic features of an inclusive society is constructive communication and constant interactions. As undergraduates of the State universities, the participants are exposed to diverse cultures and ethnicities. However, the data analysis suggests an alienated division, in which interactions are minimum and modicum. For, if close affiliations were maintained, the rupture would not prevail.

Moreover, the inability to recognize the Tamil community as a part of the nation is also evident through the position of the Sinhalese –speaking participants, whilst the frame of mind displayed by the Tamil –speaking communities is suggestive of their yearning to receive due acceptance within the society. “Sri Lanka’s population is comprised of 75 percent Sinhalese and 24 percent Tamil speakers (11% Sri Lankan Tamils, 9% Moors, and 4% Indian Tamils), with smaller communities of Malays, Burghers, and others” (Martyn). The statistical analysis of the population precisely identifies the different communities residing within the island. Notwithstanding, the Sinhalese –speaking participants argue that the anthem should be sung in the language spoken by the majority of the populace. The conflict of interpersonal perspectives on granting due recognition to the ‘ethnic -others’ due to the apprehension on accepting the Tamil community as a faction of the island’s citizenry is visible in the above data.

Another significant factor influencing the inclusivity-led reconciliation is accepting and embracing changes. In the Sri Lankan context, after years of elongated violence, despair, and adversity, peace and reconciliation could only be initiated through embracing the new dynamics of change. The results portray that Sinhalese –speaking participants aren’t willing to accede to the metamorphosis of the post-independent period. In such a context, accepting the bilingual version of the national anthem is a way forward to social inclusion in Sri Lanka.

The Tamil translation of the Sinhalese version of the National Anthem is a word-to-word translation or a direct translation which Peter Newmark clarifies as the “best option for translating texts where the form is important as the content” (27). Thus the two versions are identical in lyrical, versification, and musical aspects. Then one could broach the question, why oppose the translation - The decision taken by the government in 2010 to abandon the Tamil translation of the National Anthem was based upon the claim that “in no other country was the National Anthem used in more than one language” (Jeyaraj). The argument produced against the Tamil version of the anthem is based on the parallel comparison with India’s national anthem, ‘Jana Gana Mana’, which is sung only in one language, despite twenty-two languages recognized by the constitution existing within the country. Despite that, the Indian national anthem represents all citizens of the country by including all bordering states with different ethnic groups in the lyrics of the national anthem as Punjab, Maratha, Gujarat, Dravidian, Utkala, Banga and Sindh, etc. In addition, the Indian constitution mentions Hindi as its official language and recognizes the other twenty-two languages as regional languages. Despite Hindi being the official and most spoken language in India, it is noteworthy that the national anthem of India was composed in Bengali by Rabindranath Tagore and is still sung in its unaltered form at official events. Solicitor General SuhadaGamlath provides a perfect retort to this contention. “I don’t know why this should be an issue; as far as I am concerned, there are a lot of countries where their National Anthem is sung in different languages. A good example is Switzerland. In the areas where more German population live, the National Anthem is sung in Deutsche, while in the provinces, there are predominantly French, it is sung in French. Where there is Dutch community they sing in Dutch, and Italians sing it in Italian, and in areas where there are predominantly Swiss, they sing it in their Suisse” (Ginige, year).

However, the national anthem of a state could be compared with no other state — every state has been built upon its own unique history. They share their own story. Their status quo and aspirations vastly differ from each other. For instance, New Zealand and Denmark have dual national anthems. Finland, Switzerland, and many other states sing their anthem in more than one language. The Canadian anthem has two languages in one. Spain’s anthem has no words at all but only the music. Several of the seventeen autonomous communities of the Kingdom of Spain and the two

autonomous cities have their own anthems, ranging from quasi-national anthems of the historical nationalities to regional anthems and songs (Ginige, year). Regional anthems exist in non-sovereign states, regions, and dependent territories such as Amazonia, Aragon, Bihar, Catalonia, Cayman Islands, and Greenland. Therefore, Sri Lanka, depending on the past recollections and appropriateness, should decide on a version of the national anthem that represents and recognize all communities.

Thus, if the country is to alleviate the social marginalization of these communities along the ethnic lines and strengthen inclusivity, a proper initiative regarding the National Anthem should be nurtured by the state promptly through cognitive perspectivism.

Recommendations

With its exploration of the perspectives in relation to the acceptance of both the Sinhalese version and the Tamil translation of the National Anthem, this paper highlights the obvious: that there is most certainly an undeniable need to find a solution to this national issue. Hence under the questionnaire, the undergraduates were asked to bring forth suggestions to overcome this dilemma through plausible solutions. Twenty-one undergraduates brought forth a novel concept in which the composition of the National Anthem converted into a bilingual narration. Hypothetically reconstructing, out of the three verses in the National Anthem, the first two to be narrated in Sinhalese and the final in Tamil. An example of such practice could be found in South Africa, where the National Anthem is composed using five of its official languages; Xhosa, Zulu, Sesotho, Afrikaans, and English. Singing one Anthem in each other's language truly has the potential to unite all people irrespective of their diverse stances. Another seven of the undergraduates, in their recommendations, suggested an English translation that could be used in all official and state functions, which will ultimately procreate a universality in the National Anthem.

Additionally, the LLRC recommends the following concerning the National Anthem:

8.296 On the question of the National Anthem, the practice of the National Anthem being sung simultaneously in two languages to the same tune must be maintained and supported. Any change in this practice at the present time

would only create a major irritant which would not be conducive to fostering post conflict reconciliation. (321)

The answers provided by the Tamil language speakers are suggestive of the pestering wound pertaining to the Tamil translation of the National Anthem. ErandaGinige, in an article captioned ‘Language of the National Anthem’, remarks:

I don’t sing the anthem merely because it is the “national” anthem. I sing the anthem because its words have beautiful meaning. When those beautiful words are sung loudly my heart is filled with pride. I don’t sing it for others. I sing it for myself. The deep inspiration I gain by singing it is very personal for me.

But if I don’t know the meaning of the words, then I will not gain any of the above. It is like how some of devotes chant Pali sutras without knowing the meaning of the words –empty. Forcing Tamil or Muslim citizens who do not understand Sinhala to sing in Sinhala is the same –empty. When they sing it in the language they understand, they will gain everything I gain. They will gain the same pride. They will gain the same inspiration. Thus the purpose of the anthem will be fulfilled.

An anthem is meant to be sung. Not to just listen and move your lips as another group sings or while recorded version is played. Therefore, let us actually ‘sing’ the anthem. Play the music only and let the citizens sing their anthem in their preferred language. Then you will realize if you actually know the words. And if you don’t, then you will at least make an effort to learn it, so you will understand the meanings of the words. And perhaps then, at least some of you will realize that there is no language to any song. (Ginige, year)

Similarly, in a D.B.S. Jeyarajcolumn titled ‘Singing the National Anthem in Tamil hailing “Mother Lanka” as “Sri Lanka Thaaye”’, the writer of Tamil descent, vocalizes:

It was after I relocated to Jaffna in my mid –teens, that I started hearing the national anthem being sung in Tamil. However, it was while listening or singing the national anthem in mother tongue Tamil that I really understood

and above all felt what it was all about. Politically I found the content unobjectionable as the words were about mother Lanka and the virtues of the country and not about any particular ethnicity. However, I must admit that though I understood the national anthem better in Tamil, I liked hearing it being sung in Sinhala, as the words seemed to resonate mellifluously exuding a mood of *joi de vivre*...

It is my hope and prayer that patriotic Tamils should be able to hail “Mother Lanka” as “Sri Lanka Thaaye” in their “ThaaiMozhi” (mother tongue).
(Jeyaraj, year)

The sentiments of two writers epitomizing the two ethnicities encapsulate the notion behind a national anthem. That National anthem is not just about a patriotic song but also a national treasure entitled to all communities. “A national anthem has the power to unite or divide a nation. The anthem represents a country’s values, its principals and motives.” (Weeratunga, year). Therefore, a national anthem is a significant feature of each and every country. Hence, countries often struggle to create an ideal version of the anthem to prevail negative ramifications and establish peace and unity through a co-habiting approach. For example, the former anthem of West Germany was associated with Nazi Germany, and West Germany struggled for years to define a new national anthem. Likewise, at this monumental juncture, Sri Lanka also has to take salient decisions to unify the divided communities.

Hence, the time has come to make bold choices and changes to embrace harmony amongst the divided communities. Further observations along a wide audience representing the entirety of the nation would allow a starting point to the course. Every dimension of the society from the grassroots level to the ruling authorities ought to be involved; whilst the academia could play a salient role in facilitating the required underpinning for a better comprehension on a more structured degree. This could involve further research that would magnify the prevailing issue within the society for every person to identify and address. Awareness through such endeavors would ultimately build more rapport and dialogue leading way to response from all stakeholders.

Unity through National Anthem, as it is, after all, “Sri Lanka Matha”, not “Sinhala Matha” or “Tamil Matha”. If the country is to move forward, reconciling the differences and healing the wounds of years of separatism, inclusion, and unity is the path to take. Sri Lanka has one National Flag that is the epitome of inclusion; the orange stripe representing the Tamils and the green stripe representing the Muslims. Similarly, the country must take the required steps to include the Tamil-speaking kindred in the National Anthem. Sri Lanka must cease to be divided; the choice is ours, and the decision needs to be taken now.

In wisdom and strength
renewed
ill –will, hatred, strife all ended,
in love enfolded, a mighty
nation
marching onward, all as one.

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