

English Translation of Chief Minister C.V. Wigneswaran's speech at FeTNA on July 4, 2015

The Chief Minister began by making it known he was, "setting foot on American soil here today, since last coming to this country 11 years ago to attend his son's convocation ceremony when he earned his MPhil degree," not hiding his "joy" in participating in an event where so many Tamils were gathered together.

"We are bound by the power of our Tamil Annai (Mother), her unique characteristic being her language, one which we are immensely proud of," he said.

Citing Prof. R. P. Sethupillai who once said, "God so decreed for the great Tamil poet Kamban to be in Tamil Nadu to make up for the fact that the Himalayas was not in Tamil Nadu," the Chief Minister so enthusiastically shared his love for the Tamil language and its emissaries and proponents.

And so in singing the praise of such Tamil literary giants, he quoted Parathiar who said of them: "It's the truth and not to be boastful to say there is no one born who could be compared to the likes of Kamban, Valluvan or Elangko!"

The Chief Minister in continuing to quote Parathiar, highlights the dream that the 'Maha Kavi' had: "That we who are so ignorant, going about dumb, deaf and blind must hear this word; If you wish to thrive and prosper, it is for you to make our Tamil language flourish!"

"Parathiar's focus was to propagate the Tamil language in every street that existed. We believe he obviously wanted the language to flourish locally but he also so desired that although rooted inside, the Tamil people should be like the 'Light House' to the outside world; that their potential should be known throughout the globe. There is no glory in sharing old stories in isolation. Parathiar wanted the world to recognize and pay homage to our unique potentialities. Seeing this crowd it's as if Parathiar's dream has become a reality," the Chief Minister said!

The Chief Minister listed as vitally important, three expectations from Tamils that people hold dear all over the globe: The first is to making the Tamil language grow and flourish, the second is to preserving and making the language sustainable and the third is to defending and safeguarding the interests of the Tamil speaking people.

In pursuing these objectives he first spoke of its growth, expanding on Parathiar's dream, that:

1. The sweet honey like sound of the Tamil language must be heard round the world
2. The language must be made to flourish for it to thrive
3. The literary compositions of distinguished authors must be translated in Tamil
4. Tamil expertise, skill and talent must be recognized and celebrated by the world, for all to see.

And so the Chief Minister was full of praise for the Tamil Diaspora: "We are proud of the fact that today Tamils who have sought refuge outside of their places of birth, have become so involved in seeing the Tamil language grow. You have helped spread the sweet honey like sound of the Tamil language, round the world; you have without question made it flourish; Tamil is being spoken, heard, broadcast and televised the world over; now we have the advantage of reading more foreign literary works translated into Tamil; the growing number of new compositions in Tamil makes us proud; your expertise and talent is known throughout the world; you doubtlessly have and are making Parathiar's dream a reality."

As for sustaining the language, the Chief Minister minced no words in underscoring, "the need for the language to be spoken precisely and correctly; for future generations to be told and made to excel in it;

it's you who must tell me, are you teaching the language to your children; are you extolling to them its virtues, its antiquity, its intrinsic worth and the fact that it's the taproot of our ethnic identity; despite being Tamil, you must know, you don't have to hear it from me to know that by ensuring our children's fluency in other languages to the detriment of ours, we are not helping towards its preservation," he stated.

In that vein he recalled an incident once when he visited England, some youngsters had expressed an interest in discussing Hinduism with him: He met around forty to fifty students, both male and female, who except for a couple spoke to him in English. When asked whether they could speak in Tamil, they had said, "not really". He found out that these youngsters had picked up what they had gathered in conversations their parents had with others but never really learned the language formally. When he had asked his former law students living in England why they hadn't taught their children Tamil – the distance and the Sunday only classes were factors that made it difficult for them to send their children to Tamil school, they told him. Although they had assured him that their children were being taught at home, the children when talked to in Tamil answered in English, the reason being he was told that there was no time for them to be taught at home. Asking if the situation was the same here, he quickly answered the question himself to applause he didn't think it was the case here after seeing the programmes arranged for the FeTNA event which he was witness to.

The Chief Minister took pains to instill in the minds of his audience, the need for making provisions for their children to learn the language in order to preserve it; only by speaking it, can a language be sustained, he told them.

Tamil, he said was not merely a language but it also provides the essence to how life must be lived. Our arts, culture, values and way of life are part and parcel of, and are inter woven into our language. Reinforcing the need for children to be taught the language, he recalled further a colleague of his son's at the Boston University who knew English, French and German but couldn't speak her own native Polish because, "no one taught her the language," she said, "for her to learn it."

"If this were to happen to your children, can the language be sustained," he asked his audience, telling them that they should give a lot of thought to taking steps to preserving the language, expressing a wish that, "their children develop the same depth of love they have for their language."

"The third and final aspect of my speech, **the reason that I undertook this visit** – one that unlike the other two, centered explicitly on the "we," is about **safeguarding the best interests of Tamil people.**"

"As Tamils living throughout the globe we must together, come forward to safeguard the best interests of Tamils."

"Although some Tamils are spread around the globe, I refer to those that are displaced and are, only now, slowly emerging from undergoing untold pain and suffering; their standard of life can only be described as critical; **the purpose of my visit is to make their plight be known and understood.**"

"It is our duty to help uplift those who have less in society, in socio, economic and cultural terms and by way of access to education and employment opportunities. Only when the 'haves' and the 'have-nots' come together can the best interests of the Tamil people be safeguarded and their quality of life enhanced."

"Our ancestors worked tirelessly to free us from our colonizers; it happened here as well as in Bharat (India). In Southern India the Ariya and Dravidic conflict proved sharply divisive creating a lot of issues among the Tamil speaking people."

“But the standard of life of the Tamil speaking people in South India was improving by far. This was due it should be said, to the Indian constitution. Every State in Bharat had sufficient power, authority and rights given to it by the centre to govern itself by itself. This is what I raised when Prime Minister, Narendra Modi visited us” he said:

“The Indian constitution provides for the facilitation of sustainable development, internal security, law and order, policing and protection pertaining to land and other things within the State. Our inability to function in our province to the extent you were able to help Gujarat under the Indian constitution needs to be understood.”

“In other words the 13th Amendment did not provide enough powers to our people; the centre stands to control us I said. The people of South India having emerged slowly from resolving their social issues are able to see much progress in the arts, cultural, economic and employment sectors.”

“But that is not the case in NorthEast Sri Lanka. What occurred to us did not pertain to the type of social issues that prevailed in South India; what we are being subjected to is genocide. Recently the Northern Provincial Council passed an unanimous resolution on genocide – it serves as a historical archive of the acts of genocide committed against the Tamil people until now.”

“My Sinhalese friends asked me how I allowed such a resolution to be passed by the NPC when I believe in humanitarian principles and spiritual values; it was exactly for those reasons that I came forward and ensured its passage, I replied.”

“We are living under the provisions of the 6th Amendment. Under section 157 (a) we are prohibited by law from speaking about, pursuing and or supporting separation.”

“There are 150,000 troops deployed in the Northern Province alone. In that climate we have, in an undivided, united Sri Lanka, accepting our uniqueness, our traditional and historical habitats, asked for maximum devolution of power; this was the mandate given to us; although we have put forward such reasonable proposals the South has rejected them.”

“If you are looking to ‘reconciliation’, have you not thought that for any move towards reconciliation we need to review, acknowledge and understand the past; is it possible for a person involved in humanitarian endeavors to simply accept the genocide that took place? Is it possible for a spiritual person to say he is prepared to forget the genocidal acts that took place thus far? Have you not from time to time heard the cries of dear ones of the disappeared? Without appeasing them, and finding answers to their questions, how do you expect to pursue reconciliation and move forward? These are the questions I have asked them. I say to them, only by knowing the truth, we can achieve reconciliation.”

“You have, they have asked me, only mentioned harassments and the atrocities committed by the (Sri Lankan) army, but you have not said anything about the abuses committed by your youth; it’s your government’s and your troop’s that forced the youth to take to arms; it’s your government’s and your troop’s brutal and oppressive measures that caused this war. It is the lack of confidence in government, that led our youth to take up arms. I have shared our sad story, if you feel that our youth had done something to you, you can bring your own resolution in your provincial councils; without doing so, do not ask me why I had not mentioned what our youth had done.”

“In my view, in life, any form of oppression, harm or duress must be avoided as far as possible. However when such measures are directly targeted at a race, which fights back in self-defence, the race that committed the offence of genocide is the one accountable. I will tell you about laws pertaining to self-defence.”

“Therefore what happened to us is not a question of just minor social issues of concern but genocide. We brought a resolution to draw world attention to the genocidal acts specifically targeting our people aimed to oppress and destroy. We are constantly reviewing this as part of our mission to safeguarding our people’s best interests.”

“If we are to safeguard the best interests of the Tamil speaking people in the NorthEast we need to secure ‘self-rule’ for them. In terms of provincial self-rule, the ‘canton’ model in Switzerland is very successful; There are those who say, peace and prosperity can be achieved in the country by finding a political solution based on this model for the people of the North and East and for those Tamil, Muslim, Sinhala, Tamil speaking Upcountry and other specific groups living there, aiming towards self-rule for all.”

“However it’s my estimation that intellectuals belonging to both communities are beginning to realize a ‘federal’ model is needed. We must all come forward to achieve this – I wish to say that we must all come together and act in concert to obtain it.”

“I believe you don’t need to hear it from me to know that we have to take steps to enhance the quality of life of the people of the NorthEast. The Tamil Diaspora must invest in the NorthEast in education, hygiene, livelihood and humanitarian initiatives. At one time the Northern Province, the Southern province and India were involved in initiatives requiring cooperative effort. Ferries were operating from Thooththukudi. Flights were operating from Chennai and Trichy to Palaly. The two governments must explore the possibility of resuming these services. If more dredging is undertaken and the Kankesanthurai harbour is developed fully, trade between India and Sri Lanka will improve.”

“Although we have conveyed this to the government, no one is showing interest in listening; everyone is looking to the forthcoming parliamentary elections; it’s possible politicians from the majority Sinhala community fear, facing disastrous consequences of losing in the elections if they act amicably towards the Tamils.”

“Safeguarding the best interests of the Tamil people is now the primary obligation of all Tamil speaking people of the world.”

“We explored the three different expectations of the Tamil Diaspora, which is I said, to ensure that the Tamil language flourishes, that it’s preserved and that the best interests of the Tamil people are safeguarded. I said you are making the language grow and flourish by having these great events. I also asked that you must do everything possible to make your children learn the language in order to preserve it. Thirdly under the caption: ‘safeguarding the best interests of Tamils’, I mentioned the people of the Northeast as people who are the most badly affected of all Tamils in the world today and that you must come forward to help them; and I wish to state that **you must all mobilize worldwide to achieve the best possible political solution for them.**”

“In conclusion I ask that you do everything you possibly can do to ensure the Tamil language flourishes, that it’s preserved and that the circumstances of the people of the NorthEast improve, and their lives flourish!”