

# Dissident Memory and Democratic Citizenship: Sandya Ekneligoda and Her Struggle for Justice

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**P**rageeth Ekneligoda, journalist, cartoonist, and political activist, disappeared 12 years ago on this day, somewhere between 8:30 and 9:30 p.m. on his way to a meeting with an acquaintance unknown to his friends or family. On the day of his disappearance, Prageeth had left home in the morning and had still not returned home by 9:30 at night. Following an earlier abduction, if Prageeth was not home by that hour, Sandya, his wife had made it a habit to call him, to check whether he had left his office or not and how near or far from home he was. On the night of 24 January 2010, Sandya called him

every half an hour throughout the night on both his mobile numbers, only to keep hearing the pre-recorded message that his phone was switched off.

The next morning, Sandya went to the local police station in Homagama. The senior inspector was initially reluctant to record her complaint and told her that he needs to speak with the Officer in Charge (OIC). When the OIC entered the room, he first made a joke of Sandya's complaint, saying that her husband must be at home, and that she should go home, adding that "people get abducted to become popular." Sandya stared

him down saying: “my husband Prageeth Ekneligoda need not get lost to become popular. Nor did he write to become popular; he wrote from a sense of social responsibility”. The Homagama police eventually took down her statement, but then told her that she ought to have gone to the police station in Koswatte in the first place, as the incident appeared to have occurred there, and that she had wasted their time and cost them a fax as they were now compelled to fax her statement to the Koswatte police.

Sandya then went to the Koswatte police, where she was treated with more sympathy, particularly by the women police constables. Yet neither police took an active interest to conduct an inquiry into the case in the days and weeks following her complaint. On 19 February, she and her two sons filed a *habeas corpus* application in the Court of Appeal, citing the Deputy Inspector General of the Criminal Investigation Department, the Officer in Charge of the Homagama police, the Inspector General of Police, the Attorney General, and Prageeth Ekneligoda as respondents. The Court of Appeal subsequently referred the matter for investigation to the Magistrate’s Court of Homagama. Thereafter, Sandya dedicated her life to seeking truth and justice both inside and outside the courthouse.

In November 2019, after more than nine years of inquiry and more than 300 court hearings at the Homagama Magistrate Court, the Attorney General indicted nine military intelligence officers before a special trial at bar in relation to the disappearance of Prageeth Ekneligoda. This case is still ongoing. In the last 12 years, since Sandya filed the *habeas corpus* application, she has attended almost every court sitting related to this case.

In this essay I briefly trace her legal struggle through three different governments—the second Mahinda Rajapaksa government (2010 - 2015), the Maithripala Sirisena and Ranil Wickramasinghe government (2015 - 2019), and the Gotabaya Rajapaksa government (from 2019). I show that while her struggle for justice was politicised and made substantial legal progress in the period between January 2015 and November 2019, such progress is contingent, selective, partial, and often superficial, and could not be sustained following the change of government in 2019.

I also show that her appeal for truth and justice has never been confined to the courthouse. From the very outset, as part of a repertoire of public protest and struggle, she has insistently invoked archetypal feminine figures of tragic loss, grief, and mourning as well as rage, rebellion, lamentation, imprecation, and incantation

as critical supplements to her legal struggle. Drawing from Holloway Sparks and Vasuki Nesiah, I argue that in doing so, she is not simply appealing for divine justice or engaging in a personal act of remembrance and mourning. Rather, she is critiquing legal justice; interrogating the possibility of justice through formal law in Sri Lanka, engaging in a public act of mourning; and insistently keeping the memory of Prageeth Ekneligoda alive in the public sphere, while transmitting knowledge of his disappearance. In post-war Sri Lanka, where the State denies all disappearances and constructs soldiers accused of disappearances as heroes of the State and nation, she must be considered as a subaltern dissident citizen, and her practice of protest must be considered a political act of dissident citizenship and memory vital to the practice of democracy as “a form of social and political life” (Nesiah 2013; Sparks 1997).

### **From Good Wife to Dissident Citizen**

Sandya Ekneligoda was born and went to school in Colombo. A few years before she was due to sit for her Ordinary Level (O/L) examination, she moved to Ampara to live with an uncle and continue her schooling from there, when her father was transferred on work to Galle. However, despite being a good student, she was forced to drop out of school before she could complete her O/L examination due to problems in the family that she was living with. She then moved to Galle to live with her parents and started to work as a tea plucker in a tea estate before moving back to Colombo in 1981 to work at Lanka Fishing Flies—one of the largest manufacturers of hand tied fishing flies in the world. It is there, while making fishing flies by hand, that she re-discovered her interest in poetry, literature, and writing. Not long after she started working there, she and her fellow workers (with the encouragement of Ranjini de Mel, the owner of Lanka Fishing Flies and Mr. Athula, the Production Manager) started a handwritten magazine to publish their poetry, short stories, and other musings. Sandya illustrated many of the stories, poems, or writings in the magazine herself. She also started a small library, buying books with contributions collected from the workers themselves, while submitting her own writings to newspapers and other journals.

It was here that Sandya met Monica Ruwanpathirana, a well-known Sinhala novelist and other writers such as Nimal Sadera and Dharmasiri Gamage who encouraged her writing. Through her friendship with Ruwanpathirana, Sandya came into contact with the Women’s Centre, a non-government organisation dedicated to protecting the rights of women workers particularly in factories within the Free Trade Zone

located in Katunayake. Eventually, she left Lanka Fishing Flies to work with the Women's Centre. Sandya was involved in their street theatre and music troupe, formed in order to raise consciousness of the everyday challenges and problems faced by women workers as well as to instil "strength and liveliness" into the workers' struggle through art and aesthetics. She was also involved in their press, which published a newspaper for the workers, with a focus on issues of interest to the workers. She worked with the Centre until 1991. It was while she was working with the Women's Centre that she finally sat for her O/L exam in 1987. 30 years later, in 2017, she also completed a foundation course at the Open University enabling her to enrol as an undergraduate student there.

Sandya met Prageeth in 1989, when she was working at the Women's Centre, and married him in 1992. Their first son Sanjaya was born in 1994. In 1995, she began working with an insurance company. In 1997 she gave birth to her second son, Harith. Thereafter Sandya had dedicated her married life to looking after their two children and supporting Prageeth's journalism and political work, abandoning a career of activism of her own. She only worked sporadically thereafter, mainly for the insurance company to supplement the family income. When Prageeth was diagnosed with a heart condition sometime in 2004 and advised to undergo bypass surgery, Sandya went back to work for the company to be able to support the family during that time. She stopped working briefly in 2005 for about six months but went back to work in 2006 and was still working there when Prageeth disappeared.

### The Court Case

During the Mahinda Rajapaksa years, the *habeas corpus* application filed by Sandya and her two sons made little progress. The government not only denied any responsibility, but a number of political leaders as well as bureaucrats sought to undermine the case by claiming that Ekneligoda was alive and well in a foreign country. In November 2011, Mohan Peiris, Attorney General and legal advisor to the President and Cabinet of Ministers, in an official presentation before the United Nations Committee Against Torture (CAT), claimed that the Government of Sri Lanka possessed information that "Mr. Ekneligoda has taken refuge in a foreign country," and that the campaign to secure the cartoonist's release was a farce<sup>2</sup>. In June 2013, Arundika Fernando, a Member of Parliament from the ruling coalition asserted the same in Parliament, referring to Ekneligoda by name.<sup>3</sup>

Sandya refused to simply observe these lies from the side-lines. She not only challenged these statements through the media but moved the court to summon these two public officials claiming to know the whereabouts of Prageeth to share this evidence in court in order to establish the falsity of these statements. Both Peris and Fernando were forced to appear in court and were cross-examined under oath as a result of Sandya's efforts. Mohan Peiris on being questioned by the court admitted that his "knowledge on this is total hearsay," and that "only God knows the truth of [Prageeth's whereabouts]."<sup>4</sup>

When Presidential elections were called in November 2015, Sandya put her energies behind supporting Maithripala Sirisena, the common candidate put forward by the United Front for Good Governance. In the run up to the elections, she campaigned passionately and tirelessly against the incumbent President Rajapaksa, with civil society groups and networks such as the Platform for Freedom, the Free Media Movement, and the National Movement for a Just Society. The electoral competition at that moment which imbued the 'Rule of Law' with some amount of cultural and political capital, provided the opportunity for Sandya to politicise her case, and she had no hesitation in doing so. She attended hundreds of meetings in Colombo and in other districts. She spoke on election platforms and lent her name and her face to propaganda material. In one pamphlet put out by Sirisena's presidential campaign appealing to women voters, Sandya's photo is one of four photos on the cover page. It is an iconic image of her with a black cloth covering the lower part of her face and her mouth. Written in white on the black cloth is the slogan "let the truth be told!"

No sooner than the presidential election was over, and Maithripala Sirisena and Ranil Wickramasinghe took office as President and Prime Minister respectively, the Ekneligoda case was handed over to the Criminal Investigation Department (CID). Within a few months, the investigation made rapid progress. By October 2015, nine suspects including a number of military intelligence personnel attached to the Third Military Intelligence Corps (MIC) Camp located in Giritale were taken into custody.

In November 2019, on the conclusion of this Magisterial inquiry, the Attorney General indicted nine military intelligence officers before a special trial-at-bar in relation to the disappearance of Prageeth Ekneligoda. They were charged under several sections of the Penal Code including Sec. 102 (abetment), Sec. 112 (concealment of the design to commit an offence

by a public officer, which is his duty to protect), Sec. 140 (unlawful assembly), Sec. 355 (kidnapping or abducting in order to murder), and Sec. 296 (murder).

Sandya felt a quiet sense of jubilation on the day she heard this news. She told me she felt she was a little bit closer to justice for her husband's disappearance. When the trial began in September 2020, she was the first witness called by the special court. However, a parallel process initiated by the Gotabaya Rajapaksa government following the 2019-20 elections has sought to undermine and impugn the magisterial inquiry as well as the trial-at-bar in relation to the Ekneligoda case.

Before the Ekneligoda trial began, all the accused in this case had filed complaints before the Presidential Commission on Political Victimisation appointed by President Gotabaya Rajapaksa in January 2020. When the trial began, this Commission was not only hearing evidence from the very same accused in the Ekneligoda case, but also summoning some of the key witnesses in the case. In December 2020, it summoned a key witness to give a statement before it, despite a court order prohibiting him from giving evidence before any other forum, until the conclusion of the Ekneligoda case. This witness in his evidence before the commission, retracted his confession given under oath to the Homagama Magistrate in 2015, stating that his confession was given under threat and duress. He subsequently also did the same before the Ekneligoda trial-at-bar.

Sandya has now filed a fundamental rights application in the Supreme Court, arguing that the Commission for Political Victimisation appointed by President Gotabaya Rajapaksa violated fundamental rules and principles of natural justice and that the entirety of its proceedings is *void ab initio*, and should have no force or consequence in law. The application also challenges the decision taken by the Cabinet of Ministers on 18 January 2021 to implement the decisions and recommendations of the Commission on Political Victimisation. Sandya's lawyer has also recently argued that Upali Abeyratne, the Chairperson of the Presidential Commission on Political Victimisation should be held in contempt of court.

### Tears and Curses

Even as Sandya has waged a legal battle for truth and justice in relation to the disappearance of Prageeth Ekneligoda, she has also deployed embodied protests as part of her repertoire of struggle. Designed to remember and make visible the disappeared and /or to accuse and judge the perpetrators, these 'protest performances' at times deploy lamentation, and at times imprecations

or incantations. At times she foregrounds pain, sorrow, and trauma and at other times rage and resistance. Her feminine icons of lament and protest are drawn from a religio-cultural archive and spectrum that is familiar to her audience—Mary, mother of Jesus, and Canda from *Sandhakiduru Jathakaya*, one of the 547 anecdotes and fables narrated by the Buddha during his lifetime, about his earlier incarnations, sometimes as an animal, sometimes as a human,<sup>5</sup> and the female goddess Pattini and demoness Kali from the Hindu/Buddhist pantheon.<sup>6</sup> They are all paradigmatic symbols of mourning, healing, and justice, and when she invokes their divine, cultural power in the polis, whether in front of the Fort railway station, Temple Trees (the Prime Minister's official residence), or the *Dalada Maligawa* (the iconic Temple of the Tooth Relic), she mimics the religious /cultural rituals associated with them.

For instance, in September 2018, she recited 25 stanzas taken from the Sinhala folk poem *Sandakidura Da Kava* in front of the Temple of the Tooth in Kandy together with a number of other women whose family members disappeared during the 1988-91 insurrection. The poem written around the 12<sup>th</sup> century is a narrative in 433 verses of the Sandakiduru Jathaka, which has been described as containing some of the finest lyrical and elegiac verses in Sinhala poetry (Fernandopulle 1999: 88). The centrepiece of this poem is a lamentation comprising more than 100 stanzas where Canda rebukes the wicked king who killed her husband. She wants to know why he killed her husband, her joy. She describes how they played in the cooling shade of trees and on sandy earth strewn with flowers. They knew no sorrow or discord, only love. The sorrow of her separation from him now burns like a fire sprung from the water and she can find no consolation. As Canda laments, she dances and all the beasts and birds of the forest and fish in the water stand still, moved, and entranced by her grief (ibid: 88). In Sinhala folk tradition, these verses are recited as part of ritual lament during funeral wakes and dramatised as folk theatre. When acted as community theatre, women roll on the ground weeping and wailing.

In January 2019, Sandya invoked the demoness Kali<sup>7</sup> in a ritual conducted on the pavement opposite the Presidential Secretariat. The pavement here is a narrow strip, fenced off from land being reclaimed from the sea for the construction of the 660 acre Port City.<sup>8</sup> She arrived there around four in the afternoon together with Sithy Ameena and Vijaya Lakshmi, two other family members of the disappeared who have often accompanied her in her protests. First, they hung an image of Kali in her incarnation as Sohokali - around six feet by four feet - on the fence separating

the pavement from the construction site. In the image that Sandya had chosen for the ritual that day, Kali is in her 10-armed and 10-legged form, wearing a skirt of human hands and a necklace of skulls. Her eyes are glowing and her ruby red tongue is protruding out of her mouth. She is dancing on the corpse of her consort Shiva and carrying in her many hands a trident, a sword, a bow and arrow, and a bowl among other symbols of her power. A banner that was hung next to the image announced that Sandya is appealing to Kali for justice, to mark the ninth anniversary of Prageeth's disappearance by the "Rajapaksa twosome", referring to the former President and his brother, the Secretary of Defence.

Next, oil lamps, an assortment of red flowers, neem leaves, incense, camphor, coconuts, eggs, turmeric water, and other ritual material were arranged before the image with the help of a small number of friends and activists who had by then gathered there in support of Sandya. Curses inscribed on banana leaves and white paper were strung to the image and scattered on the floor so that the wind will carry them to the cursed (Feel fear wherever you may go, be beaten wherever you go, fall dead heart split asunder on the way side!<sup>9</sup> struck by lightning without rain, always feel fear, struck with lightning that splits the sky, murderers fall dead!<sup>10</sup>). Once the lamps, the incense sticks, and nine pots containing camphor and coal were lit, Sandya began the repetitive chanting of imprecatory verses joined by Sithy Ameena and Vijaya Lakshmi. After she had chanted several rounds of the imprecatory verses, the three women decided to cross the road, to stand directly in front of the Presidential Secretariat. The small crowd followed by taking the image, banner, and other ritual paraphernalia with them. Sandya, Sithy Ameena, and Vijaya Lakshmi sat just outside the perimeter of the Secretariat that borders the Galle Road and continued their curses. As the sun began to set and the evening deepened and darkened, they lit nine cotton torches doused with kerosene and smashed nine coconuts before Kali, repeatedly chanting "*saapa wewa, sappa wewa, saapa wewa*" (we curse you, we curse you, we curse you).

In invoking the divine powers of Kali, Sandya is following a long history of women family members of the disappeared in Sri Lanka appealing to the Amman goddesses, even though it is important to recognise that they do so in different ways and to different ends.

The Southern Mothers' Front frequently deployed *deva kannalauwas* (beseeching the gods) as part of its repertoire of resistance. As documented by Malathi de Alwis, in these rituals, women with "absolute abandon

and passion" would break coconuts and beseech the deities to return their sons and husbands, and heap curses on those who had taken them away (de Alwis 1997: 200). In one of these ritual protests, de Alwis describes how one of the mothers chants over and over again, "Premadasa, see this coconut all smashed into bits. May your head too be splintered into a hundred bits, so heinous are the crimes you have perpetrated on my child". Another mother weeps saying "Premadasa, I bore this child in my womb for 10 months, may you and your family be cursed not for 10 days or 10 weeks or 10 months or 10 years or 10 decades, but for 10 aeons" (de Alwis 1997: 201). For these mothers, the assassination of President Premadasa at the hands of a suicide bomber and the defeat of the UNP at successive elections between 1993 and 1995 and bringing in *ape aanduwa* (our government) into power represented the most significant vindication of their cursing (de Alwis 2001; de Mel 2001). de Alwis writes that a few days after Premadasa's death, the woman who asked for Premadasa's head to be splintered, came to see her with a comb of plantains (considered to be an auspicious gift) and told her triumphantly: "He died just like the way I cursed him" (de Alwis 1997: 202). 10 years later, the Secretary of the Akuressa Mothers' Front told Neloufer de Mel:

Even today the thought of taking revenge is strong in our minds especially when we think of our children. We will never forget. The way we will take revenge is by ensuring that the UNP will not come to power... Our only aim now is to keep UNP from coming to power... As such, the Mothers' Front cannot be called an independent organization. It is a very political organization in the sense that it is against the UNP. (Secretary, Akuressa Mothers' Front cited by de Mel 2001: 258)

As de Alwis was documenting the rituals of the Southern Mothers' Front, Patricia Lawrence was documenting the resurgence of local Amman cult practices in the Eastern district of Batticaloa in response to the escalating violence and suffering caused by the war. Unlike the public rituals of the Southern Mothers' Front, the cult practices documented by Lawrence were private affairs conducted often through oracles to "facilitate a process of testimony" to overcome political silencing and acknowledge broken kinship connections, abductions and arrests, extortion practices, socio-economic paralysis, and torture. The homes of oracles became temples. They were healing and coping mechanisms (Lawrence 1997: 222).

## Dissident Citizenship and Dissident Memory

We now understand that the concept of democracy is not limited to voting and deliberative forums of debate and discussion, but rather includes dissent and acts of political protest in the public sphere, including those by women, as vital elements of democratic participation (Sparks 1997). Sparks begins her 1997 article on democratic dissent with stories of Rosa Parks, Johnnie Jay Tilman, Audre Lorde, and Candace Gingrich as a way to reclaim and recast women's activism against discrimination and oppressive power structures as democratic dissent. In her definition, a dissident citizen is one "who publicly contests prevailing arrangements of power" and "forced exclusion from institutionalised means of opposition" by means of oppositional democratic practices. Dissident citizens augment or replace institutionalised channels of democratic opposition when those channels are inadequate or unavailable; constitute alternative public spaces through practices such as marches, protests, picket lines, sit-ins, and street theatre, and reconstitute the very boundaries of the political. Such acts of dissent entail political courage (ibid: 75).

Vasuki Nesiya's Neelan Tiruchelvam Memorial lecture, delivered in July 2013, echoed Sparks to a great extent. Nesiya, however, began with Kannagi, and Antigone, the protagonists in the *Silappathikaram* (see endnote iv) and the Greek play *Antigone* by Sophocles, respectively, as a way to think through themes of dissent, justice, and democracy. Nesiya argued that Antigone's decision to give a proper burial to her brother, against the orders of the King of Thebes, has to be seen not merely as a sibling's act of personal grief and loss, but a political act—"an act of protest that goes beyond individual rebellion" and which "redefines citizenship and belonging" (2013: 13). In doing so she draws on Ranciere's distinction between democracy as a "form of government" and "democracy as a form of social and political life" as well as James Young's (1992; 1993) conception of counter memorials. She goes on to identify a number of widely different forms of protest that carry resonances of Antigone from the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, who marched every Thursday in the main town square in Buenos Aires to protest against disappearances in Argentina, and the comfort women who protested their sexual exploitation by the Japanese military during World War II, to the annual road mural painting on Kynsey Road at the site at which Neelan Tiruchelvam was killed by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam in 1999. She contends that such acts of dissident memory pluralise the public sphere; and oppose hegemonic or "self-aggrandizing celebrations which

seek to choreograph collective memory and control their public expression." Such counter memorials not only console, but also challenge; not merely redeem but also revolt; they call for social change while imagining different futures (2013: 14-15).

Sandiya's practice of protest performances follows in this tradition of dissenting citizenship and dissenting memory. Indeed, she is constantly searching for a voice, a mode, a genre in which her demand for justice can be made in the public political sphere, stylistically oscillating from narrative, reporting, lamentation, imprecation, and incantation as critical supplements to her legal struggle. In enacting these rituals in public, she—like other women next-of-kin of the disappeared—relies on motherhood, and myth models of justice associated with female deities such as Kali or parables of justice. And following Sparks and Nesiya, we must recognise these acts not merely as personal performances of mourning and remembrance or invocations of divine law as a substitute for State law. Rather, they have to be seen as political interventions which seek to open up a political space which implicitly critique the sovereignty of State law and draw attention to the impossibility of justice through formal law for those such as her. Her insistent repetitive performances challenge the denial of disappearances by the State. They challenge the narrative of the heroic soldier which has achieved dominant status in narratives of the nation and the militarised public sphere. They transmit knowledge of a traumatic event and similar traumatic events in the history of this country which the State, the perpetrators, as well as nationalist ideologues want to erase and forget. Attending to such public protests, I contend, can enable us to narrate different histories of the nation - histories that may not appear in school text-books or official publications. They allow us to tell subaltern histories of dissenting memorial practices and democratic citizenship and the ways in which democratic practices might be gendered, classed, and ethnicised.

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*Image credit: Nilshan Fonseka*

## Notes

1 I am grateful to Andi Schubert for carefully reading a very long version of this article and for his critical comments and editorial suggestions. My thanks also to Radhika Coomaraswamy for her comments.

2 Satkunanathan, Ambika. (2012). "What Sri Lanka is...": Acknowledging the ethnic conflict in post-war reconciliation". *Open Democracy* (2 March). Accessed 05.01.2022. Available at <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/opensecurity/what-sri-lanka-is-acknowledging-ethnic-conflict-in-post-war-reconcl/>

3 See Hansard, 217(5): 501.

4 *Daily FT* (2013). "Geneva 2.0: Lessons unlearned". (31 January). Accessed 05.01.2022. Available at <http://www.ft.lk/columns/geneva-2-0-lessons-unlearned/4-133003>

5 In the *Candakinnara or Sandhakiduru Jataka* (No.485), the Bodhisatta, born as a *kinnara* (mermaid) named Canda, lived with his mate Candā in the Canda Mountain in Himavā. One day, while they were disporting themselves near a little stream, singing and dancing, the king of Benares, who had gone hunting, saw Candā and fell in love with her. So he killed Canda with an arrow, and when Candā lamented aloud at the sight of her dead husband the king revealed himself and offered her his love and his kingdom. Canda scorned the offer and protested to the gods that they should have allowed harm to befall on her husband. *Sakka* (the Lord of the Devas in Buddhist cosmology) whose throne was heated by Canda's great loyalty would later restore Canda to life.

6 The goddess Pattini (Sinhala) or Kannaki (Tamil) is one of the most popular deities with a cult following, particularly among Buddhists in the Western, Southern, and Sabaragamuwa Provinces and the Hindus in the Eastern Province. Her life is narrated in one of the greatest poems of Tamil literature, the *Silappatikaram*, composed by Ilango Adikar around A.D. 500-800. In Sri Lanka, the textual traditions of the Pattini cult are embodied in a compendium known as *pantis colmura*, 35 ritual texts in which her story is narrated in a Buddhist mould with minor differences from the version in the *Silappatikaram*. A truncated version of her story is as follows: Pattini or Kannagi's beloved husband Kovalan is wrongly accused by the King of Madurai of stealing the Queen's anklet. Kovalan is beheaded for the crime. Kannagi storms the palace and proves her husband's innocence. The King is anguished by this miscarriage of justice and is killed by his own regret. Yet Kannagi's own quest for justice remains unsatisfied by this individual accountability. Protesting the entire system that persecuted her husband, she sets fire to the city. In Sri Lanka, the goddess used to be propitiated in collective annual post-harvest rituals of thanksgiving and celebrated in ritual dramas. Although these rituals and dramas have all but vanished, she is still worshipped and supplicated in shrines across the country as a goddess of fertility and health. Kali is a "ferocious mother goddess in Hinduism whose wrath is believed to be responsible for drought, plague, famines and pestilence although in Sinhala Buddhist mythology she is a servant of Kali to whom she entrusts the world. Both are considered arbiters of justice who punish evil doers and redress wrongs, provided the request is not unjust." (Obeyesekere 1975: 15) Obeyesekere argues that the Kali cult, where sorcery and cursing is common although performed secretly, has increasingly superseded the Pattini cult (Obeyesekere 1975; 1984). He also found that a considerable number of people who invoked Kali had taken some form of official action such as informing the police or headman, or seeking court redress, while referring to the futility of such action (1975: 15).

7 Kali has many forms (see Bastin 1996: 62). In Sri Lanka she is mostly known in her two incarnations as Badrakali and *Sobonkali* (Kali of the graveyard). Obeyesekere is of the view that Badra Kali will act on your behalf if your cause is just: *Sobon Kali* may abdicate her moral judgement if you have sufficient faith in her, although Obeyesekere argues that for the vast majority of people who invoke Kali, the old conviction still holds: unless your cause is just, the deities will not help you. "what is therefore impressive is that the old conception of justice, the idea that righteousness must prevail in the world, is alive and well in the minds of many ordinary people." (2018: 225-226)

8 *Daily Mirror*. (2017). "Port City to attract US\$ 13 bn investment from 2018". (1 April). Accessed 07.01.2022. Available at <https://www.dailymirror.lk/article/Port-City-to-attract-US-bn-investment-from-company--126579.html>

9 In Sinhala the verse goes as "Yana yana thana baya daniyan, Hama hama vita gabi palayan, Papuwa palee maga vatiyan..."

10 "Vahi nathi hena atha vatiyan, Ninanthare baya daniyan, Abasa pala akunu vadhee, Mineemaruwa mare vatiyan..."

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