



# Tamil Information Centre

தமிழ் தகவல் நடுவம்

THULASI

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Committed to Human Rights and Community Development

## Vairamuttu Varadakumar, 1949-2019



*Mr Vairamuttu Varadakumar of the London-based Tamil Information Centre (TIC) died on 13 March 2019 in the Kingston, UK. His sudden exit from our midst has come as a shock to people who knew him and those who depended on his work.*

## Mr Varadakumar - A man committed to the welfare of the people.

Varadakumar was born on 11 May 1949 in Colombo, the capital of Sri Lanka, a year after the end of British rule. The middle of three brothers, he grew up in the Tamil north of the island at Manipai in Jaffna and went to school at Jaffna Hindu College. He later studied at Madras Christian College in Chennai, south India, before moving to London. There, he found his calling as a community organiser and human rights researcher, constantly putting a mischievous spanner in the engine of oppression. In London, he embodied international solidarity, working closely with groups like Campaign Against Arms Trade and Liberation (formerly the Movement for Colonial Freedom), sharing office space with activists from other countries involved in promotion of rights.

When the civil war finally ignited between Sri Lanka's Sinhalese ethnic majority and the Tamil minority in July 1983, Varadakumar was already a key part of the nascent Tamil Information Centre (TIC). He was an important member of the team that established the TIC in London in 1981, with the aim of empowering the Tamil speaking people of Sri Lanka to improve the quality of life through access to knowledge, information and a range of services, programmes and projects, with the object of creating a united, cohesive society without persecution, where the individual is respected, cared for and loved, and where human rights are respected, fostered and promoted. The TIC liaised and cooperated with a wide variety of organizations and individuals in Sri Lanka and other countries, and international organizations involved in the promotion of peace, human rights, refugee protection, relief, rehabilitation and development. Varadakumar played a primary, enthusiastic and committed role in the TIC for more than 35 years which led to its success in the promotion of human rights and assisting people affected by the war in Sri Lanka.

Varadar's commitment, the incredible amount of hours he put into his work, the tremendous stresses he underwent, the sacrifices he made of his life, would have had its toll on him. Yet, he went on relentlessly not caring for himself - all for the cause of the emancipation of the Tamil-speaking people of Sri Lanka so that they could live in peace, harmony, and most of all, with dignity and without political, social, cultural or economic subjugation. Varadakumar's undaunted commitment, devotion and consistency to the cause of the Tamil-speaking people in particular, and Sri Lankan people in general were such that he would neither shed any of his heavy volume of work nor slow down his hectic speed; but continue to perform what he thought was right and proper, without any concern for his health. Whenever his health was mentioned by colleagues and friend, he would just laugh it off.

Varadakumar's commitment to work was such that he neglected his personal life. He lived a very frugal life with just the basic needs of food, clothing and shelter. He spent most of the time of the day attending to the work of the TIC. He would be either be working in the premises of the TIC or attending meetings related to the people of Sri Lanka - Tamils of the North-East region, Tamils of the hill-country, Muslims or the Sinhalese. His vision, aspirations, and commitment were to a wider society. Shunning any possibilities of a lucrative professional life, he chose to work for the rights and liberation of the Tamil-speaking people from his early life, associating himself with the TIC. Deftly avoiding political pressures and other constraints, he stuck to his conviction and commitment that 'human rights' and

‘humanism’ is the impregnable rock - the foundation - on which any society, community or a nation should be built.

Varadar was also of the view that political, social, cultural and economic subjugation and lack of progress of Sri Lanka as a country, is mainly due to ‘majoritarianism’ and chauvinism trampling on the aspirations of the minorities in one form or another and should be best confronted not only as one against the Tamils but also as against all the minority communities and sections of Sri Lanka. He believed that only when all communities in Sri Lanka are genuinely granted their due rights can there be a durable peace, progress and prosperity in the country. He tried to bring about a consensus and constructive link not only among the various Diaspora Tamil organisations and those in them but also those in the political and social structures in Sri Lanka. He saw the inevitable need of the civil societies in Sri Lanka to bring about the transformation for the good of all the communities of Sri Lanka and forged contacts with many of them.

During discussions and meetings, he had expressed his frustration at the intransigence of the Sri Lankan governments, the disunity amongst the Tamil community both in Sri Lanka and in the shores that they have chosen to settle, their short-sightedness, and lack of proper perspectives. He was concerned of the different and conflicting directions that the Tamil Diaspora organisations and the Tamil leadership in Sri Lanka are taking either because of personal prestige and self-aggrandisement, and often not based on clear and objective analysis and evaluation of the reality but according to their whims and fancies –all eventually to the detriment of the long-term interest of the Tamils. His frustration was also that despite the fact that there are many qualified, able and well- to-do among the Sri Lankan community in the UK, except from a very few, there has been a lack of involvement and support. He undertook many projects that would help and accelerate the achievements and the aspirations of the Tamil speaking people of Sri Lanka.

Varadakumar’s contribution to TIC’s information, human rights and refugee work was tremendous. He maintained contact with academics, scholars and people at the grass roots level and contributed to a huge number of documents published by the TIC. He also initiated the publication of several journals, such as *Tamil Information*. These were distributed throughout the world and helped Tamils, particularly refugees in their applications for refugee status. On refugee and human rights issues, he was in contact with members of governments in many countries, particularly where Tamils resided, to provide information on the situation in Sri

Lanka, to seek assistance for refugees and internally displaced people in Sri Lanka and to promote peace with justice. He visited other countries for discussions with the Tamil community and government members to encourage peace in Sri Lanka. Immediately before the Norway-involved peace talks, he visited Oslo on the invitation of the Norwegian government and addressed and encouraged Norwegian Ministers and the Norwegian legislature for involvement of the Tamil community in the peace process. Varadakumar was also in constant touch with Tamil, Sinhalese and Muslim people in Sri Lanka and politicians including Members of Parliament to encourage promotion of sustainable peace.

He helped in the establishment of a number of organizations for promotion of human rights and peace and encouraged the formation of the Sri Lanka-based Centre for Human Rights and Development (CHRD) which helped Tamil human rights victims. When the disastrous tsunami devastated Sri Lanka, he visited the island to help the people in several villages in the establishment of village committees to take up rehabilitation issues with government departments and international and local organizations.

The TIC continued uninterrupted since its formation in the early 1980s because of Varadar's unabated and undaunted personal commitment and dedication despite set-backs. He organised the volunteers, encouraged them, guided them and maintained regular contact with the activists of all other Tamil organisations, not only in the UK but also in other countries. Varadakumar was also instrumental in the formation of Centre for Community Development (CCD) and ably guided it to function successfully meeting its social objectives. He would be at the TIC at all hours greeting the volunteers of both TIC and CCD and giving them guidance.

We will very much miss you in our midst. Fare thee well Varadar; when comes another as you, Varadar?

End://

***The details of Varadakumar's last rites and funeral are as follows:***

**Last rites**

Sunday 24 March 2019 between 7.00 am and 10.00 am at,

Richard Challoner School  
Manor Drive North  
New Malden KT3 5PE  
UK

**Funeral**

Sunday 24 March 2019 from 10.45 am at,

Putney Vale Cemetery and Crematorium  
Stag Lane  
Wimbledon  
London SW15 3DZ  
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