

TWENTY YEARS

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*Of Conversation*



# The Neelan Tiruchelvam Memorial Lecture

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1999 - 2019

*Twenty Years of Conversation*



# A Living Memorial

July 29, 1999. Vasuki Nesiah was on her way to meet Neelan Tiruchelvam when she heard he would not be able to keep their appointment. As his course assistant, Vasuki had been working with Neelan, helping him to prepare for a constitutional law class that considered how the Tamil epic *Silapadikaram* and the Greek tragedy *Antigone* could be ‘sources’ of law, ethics and politics as much as any constitution or legal tome.

Neelan would never arrive for their meeting. He died that morning at the junction of Kynsey Road and Rosmead Place when a suicide bomber stepped into the path of his car. Vasuki rushed to the side of Neelan’s beloved wife. “It was Sithie’s super-human strength which helped us all cope with that terrible day and its aftermath,” she remembers.

As the news spread across the island and the world, the women were among thousands united in grief, each keenly aware that this was a loss that was both deeply personal and yet collective. The author Amitav Ghosh was in New York, and was horrified to hear the news. “At that time he, more than anyone else, represented the possibility of a just resolution of Sri Lanka’s political problems, because of his


refusal to compromise with ethnic extremists of any sort,” Amitav says. Back home, for Vasuki too, Neelan had been a vital public presence, one who upheld a robust, generous and pluralistic vision of their collective future. “A bleak period in Sri Lanka’s history felt even bleaker.”

In the years leading up to this moment, it would be fair to say Neelan had lived an extraordinary life. His roles were numerous: a lawyer by profession and a senior partner at Tiruchelvam Associates, he was also recognized as a distinguished public intellectual who stood at the nexus of scholarship, activism and politics and who had to his credit many publications on law, social justice and development.

As the founder and director of both the Law and Society Trust and the International Center for Ethnic Studies, Neelan was a dedicated institution builder; a human rights advocate who was key to establishing the Human Rights Commission in Sri Lanka and gave the impetus for the South Asian Human Rights Initiative; a civil society activist for democracy who initiated the South Asian Elections Monitor Group and would serve as a member of several international election monitoring and expert missions to Pakistan (1988), Chile (1988), Kazakhstan (1992), Ethiopia (1992) and South Africa (1993). Finally, as a politician and parliamentarian he helped to shape a groundbreaking constitutional proposal for a decentralized and devolved political structure that many hoped would hold the key to peace for Sri Lanka.

After his death, Sithie established the Neelan Tiruchelvam Trust in 2001. To date, it is the only Sri Lankan grant-making organization supporting work done by community organizations in the areas of human rights, good governance and peace building.

Reflecting on these many identities and his enduring legacy, Gowher Rizvi, the Bangladeshi historian, scholar and academic said of Neelan that his life was a triumph of



optimism over cynicism. “Some are intimidated by darkness but Neelan choose to light a candle; some despaired at the violence but Neelan drew his line and chose to fight his ground; faced with what at the time seemed insuperable and overwhelming problems, some chose to bury their heads in the sands but Neelan brought succor and became a beacon of hope; and even when some people cynically accept that injustice, poverty and violence are a part of the society, Neelan decided to take a stand and fight oppression in any way he could.”

Now Neelan was gone, and Sithie and his friends were faced with the question of how to best remember him. Ambika Satkunanathan, then a young lawyer, remembers that Sithie wanted something unconventional and that over time and across several different efforts, this notion crystallized into the idea of having a lecture series. As the then Chair of the Neelan Tiruchelvam Trust, Sithie brought the series under NTT. Many of the lectures were paired with workshops and on Neelan’s birthday they would host a cultural event of the kind he so enjoyed.

The introduction to the Commemoration Programme held in 2000 stated: ‘On July 29th, 1999 life seemed to stop and we were left with darkness, until darkness could be no more. And Neelan challenged us, in death as he had in life, to tread beyond the shadows cast by hatred, fear, anger and desolation.’

Over the next two decades, the lectures and performances selected were always a reflection of what would have interested Neelan himself, says Ambika, who today serves as the Chairperson of NTT. “He was someone who loved literature, and loved the arts. He made it a point to educate himself about these things. We saw too how Neelan was always someone who wanted to share this knowledge, and to create space for thinkers and artists to function and to amplify their voices. That was Neelan to the core and that is how we chose to honour his memory.”

The earliest lectures were often focused on human rights and constitutional law, but over time, the series expanded to include musicians, writers, artists, journalists, researchers, lawyers, transitional justice practitioners and historians. This evolution began to reflect Neelan's interests beyond just the professional. "It was organic in a sense because we too began to look more broadly at the common elements that wove the interdisciplinary nature of his interests together," says Ambika.

Speakers would bring with them stories of the wider world: Ian Martin who had been a special representative of the UN spoke of challenges of balancing justice and human rights with political realities in post-conflict East Timor, El Salvador and Guatemala; Alexander L. Boraine then President of the International Centre for Transitional Justice looked at truth and reconciliation in the South African context; Galuh Wandita, Director, Asia Justice and Rights took us to Jakarta, Indonesia where survivors stood before the truth commission to share their stories; a Professor of Law, Ronald C. Slye drew on his experiences with transitional processes in South Africa, Cambodia, and Kenya to suggest how Sri Lanka might approach difficult issues and make strategic choices in its own context.

British Israeli architect Eyal Weizman's lecture on the use of forensic architecture in places of conflict, such as Palestine and Pakistan, highlighted how multidisciplinary collaborations could lead to more effective human rights investigations. The musician and public intellectual T.M Krishna argued that culture is far more than an identity; it is an experience and one that could prove transformative.

Director of the South Asia Institute at Columbia University, E. Valentine Daniel quoted Shakespeare in his lecture on remembering the unfallen while Romila Thapar, an Emeritus Professor of Ancient Indian History, referenced the importance of oral histories alongside historical texts in her lecture on history and identities. The former

vice-chancellor of the University of Delhi, Upendra Baxi in a ‘conversation with Neelan’ began with the lines from John Donne: ‘One short sleep past, we wake eternally, And death shall be no more; Death, thou shalt die.’

The Indian scholar, author, and environmentalist, Ramachandra Guha was interested in how to make South Asian cities habitable, a concern he shared with British Parliamentarian Clare Short, who delivered her lecture on the nexus between poverty, inequality, and environmental degradation.

Then a staff writer with the New York Times, Steve Coll delivered notes from America since September 11. Narendra Subramanian and David Miller, both professors of political science stood behind the lectern to emphasize the need to nurture a pluralistic polity and to confront the challenges of democracy.

Some speakers drew on the lessons they believed Neelan’s life offered. Michael Ignatieff, former Leader of the Liberal Party of Canada, spoke of the causes to which Neelan had dedicated his life: “He believed in politics, and because he believed in politics, he believed in compromise.” In his lecture on the duty and concept of responsibility to protect, Gareth Evans, President of the International Crisis Group noted that “Neelan knew that political will is never waiting in a cupboard to be found: it has to be nurtured and generated, campaigned for persistently and relentlessly.”

Walking in Neelan’s footsteps, NTT too had to embrace persistence to ensure the lecture series would survive. Amitav still remembers the day in July 2001, when he arrived to deliver his talk: “Katunayake airport was filled with the burnt-out skeletons of aircraft that had been blown up by the LTTE. It was a grim and horrifying sight, a shocking contrast to the Sri Lanka I had known during my childhood...” However,

he did not let what he saw deter him, and neither would the others. NTT would continue to welcome speakers to these shores even in the year the tsunami struck, even at the end of the war, through the pivotal elections of 2015, and now in the wake of the Easter Sunday bombings.

As a result, for Sri Lankan audiences the lecture hall hosting these talks has become a space of quiet resistance, withstanding the politics of tyranny, identity and censorship that might hold sway outside it. “We are not about censorship, we are not afraid. So over the years, we have found a way to talk about even very sensitive issues, but to do it cleverly,” says Ambika, explaining that it has felt like a critical mission to safeguard the room for discourse that Neelan helped carve out and support in his own lifetime.

In 2019, NTT will mark twenty years of these conversations. It is a moment to both grieve Neelan and Sithie, and to celebrate lives that continue to illuminate our path, to give us hope and direction; a chance to engage with perspectives from around the world and to find camaraderie in the face of our shared challenges.

In the end, says Vasuki, “The lecture series is as close as we can get to a living memorial. It has been a prism capturing this richness and shining back a new dimension every year.”



*“We cannot glorify death, whether in the battlefield or otherwise. We, on the other hand, must celebrate life, and are fiercely committed to protecting and securing the sanctity of life, which is the most fundamental value without which all other rights and freedoms become meaningless.”*

*Neelan Tiruchelvam*

*Debate on the extension of the State of Emergency,*

*Parliament of Sri Lanka*

*15 June, 1999*





1999 - 2019

THE NEELAN TIRUCHELVAM  
MEMORIAL SPEAKERS

# NATIONALISM

“...But he [Neelan] also spoke very courageously and very directly against what he saw as a crisis in the legitimacy of your state. Because he was a constitutional lawyer, because he valued the rule of law, he was extremely concerned about the weakening legitimacy of your state, of national government... I suggest to you that his ultimate allegiance as a thinker, as a writer, was not to any particular community, but to an idea of the rule of law, the idea of the validity of the state as an arbiter, as a source of fairness, as a source of justice in this and in everything in society. Now in Neelan’s tragedy I see a man fighting on two fronts at once, and eventually being destroyed because it is impossible to fight on two fronts. A man contesting the ways in which the Sri Lankan state is losing its legitimacy, and man fighting within his own community against those who were using violence and terror to define what it stands for. But this was a heroic and noble struggle, one that I commend to you as a fine example, but pursued at a terrible cost.”

- From ‘Nationalism and Self-Determination: Is there an Alternative to Violence?’

*Michael Ignatieff is a university professor, writer and former leader of the Liberal Party of Canada. He is best known as the author of ‘Blood and Belonging: Journeys into the New Nationalism’ and the ‘Russian Album.’*

2000

MICHAEL IGNATIEFF



# HUMAN RIGHTS

“...The claims of justice in the cause of human rights are not without serious dilemmas when it comes to the practicalities of negotiating and sustaining an end to political conflict. Addressing human rights violations can contribute to the negotiation of peace: as you know all too well in Sri Lanka, a cycle of gross abuses on one or both sides of a political conflict deepens and perpetuates its bitterness. But human rights violations are rarely entirely gratuitous: they are the symptoms of the struggle over political power or control of economic resources. Campaigning against human rights violations on its own can limit them, but it is only the resolution of the underlying conflicts that will altogether end them. Those of us whose perspective on conflicts is that of human rights activists must therefore have great respect for the role of those whose task is to seek to resolve them.”

- From *‘Human Rights, Political Conflict and Compromise.’*

*Ian Martin was a Special Representative of the United Nations’ Secretary-General in East Timor (1999), Nepal (2007-9) and Libya (2011-2). He was Secretary-General of Amnesty International from 1986 to 1992.*

2000

IAN MARTIN



# LITERATURE

“There is no reassurance in history. The human past, like the present, is dark, ugly and saturated with suffering. There is nothing in it that can diminish by one iota our misgivings about the future. But our history is ours alone, it is not that of France, or Britain or the United States, or indeed that of Burma or Thailand. There is no mechanism that can be trusted to lead us securely into that golden land where the passage of time is ruled by the march of reason. This means not that we should resign ourselves to the vagaries of forces that we are powerless to influence, but precisely the opposite: that we accept the responsibility of the indeterminate; accept that the small battles of everyday life are no less meaningful than the large conflicts of state; accept, in other words, the full burden of right conduct, as applied to the challenges of our era. This was to my mind, the message and the meaning of the quietly heroic life of Neelan Tiruchelvam...”

- From *'No Greater Sorrow: Times of Joy Recalled In Wretchedness'*

Amitav Ghosh is a novelist, anthropologist, and Professor of Comparative Literature, Queens College, City University of New York.



2001

AMITAV GHOSH



# RECONCILIATION

“Through the telling of their own stories both victims and perpetrators have given meaning to their multi-layered experiences of the South African story. Through the media these personal truths have been communicated to the broader public. Oral tradition has been a central feature of the Commission’s process. Explicit in the Act is an affirmation of the healing potential of truth-telling. One of the objectives of the TRC was to restore the human and civil dignity of victims by granting them an opportunity to relate their own accounts of the violations of which they were the victims. It is important to underline that the stories we listened to didn’t come to us as arguments or claims as if in a court of law. They were often heart-wrenching, conveying unique insights into the pain of our past. To listen to one man relate how his wife and baby were cruelly murdered is much more powerful and moving than statistics which describe a massacre involving many victims. The conflict of the past is no longer a question of numbers and incidents; the human face has shown itself, and the horror of murder and torture is painfully real.”

- From *‘Truth and Reconciliation in Times of Conflict: The South African Model’*

Alexander L. Boraine was the founder and former president of the International Center for Transitional Justice. He passed away in December 2018.

2002

ALEXANDER L. BORAINÉ



# ANTHROPOLOGY

“If terror is to be hunted down, it must be banished from cliché. We need to rely not on the told, but in the telling. We have heard it told and told ourselves of acts of terror in ways that incite rage and revenge, hate and pride, pity and compassion, action and stunned repose. But we need to find new ways of speaking of terror so as to hold terror itself at bay, to check its advance into the general and the commonplace, to restrict it to the particular. If terror is not to become cliché, it must be remembered in the details of its manifestations, the details of face. I hope that someday, the Indian soldier who shot the mother who was holding her baby will come to know terror, know it as it was in that mother’s face; or come to know all that is unnameable - which, for want of another word, could only be called “divine”- it was in the baby’s face that he never looked at before shooting it in the back of his head. In Neelan’s face, I never saw fear, let alone terror, but what I did see was faith, hope and love. If there were only three antidotes to terror that one could choose, one couldn’t do better than ask for faith, hope and love. If, however, faith, hope and love themselves were not to become clichés, they must be remembered in and learned from the details of face. For me at least, such details appear and reappear in the memory of Neelan Tiruchelvam’s face.”

- From *‘Whose Face is That I See? Remembering the Unfallen’*

*E. Valentine Daniel is a Professor of Anthropology and Director of the South Asia Institute at Columbia University. He is best known as the author of ‘Charred Lullabies.’*

2003

E. VALENTINE DANIEL



*“It is in [Neelan’s] memory that we must confront any dilemma:  
we must strive to minimise, when we cannot altogether avoid, the  
sacrifice of justice to peace, or of peace to justice.”*

*Ian Martin*

*Memorial Speaker, 2000*



# EQUALITY

“I believe that we are living at a time of great challenge and great opportunity. Our generation, like every previous generation has to reach out to the poor and the needy and to seek justice and the reduction of suffering. All the great world religions impose such obligations upon their adherents. And all moral teachings require a respect for justice and the equal worth of each person. But our generation has a greater obligation than previous generations because we are living at a time when humanity has the capacity to eliminate extreme poverty from the human condition. And in addition, we are living at a time when poverty, inequality and environmental degradation threaten the future of everyone, whether they are rich or poor, or live in the North or South. It is often argued that what is morally right is rarely politically attractive. Whether or not that was true in the past, it is true no longer. If we fail to make progress in reducing poverty and sharing the Earth’s environmental resources more equitably, we are heading for turmoil and catastrophe and that will cause great suffering to all.”

- From *Justice and Human Rights for All - The Key to Peace and a Sustainable World*

Clare Short is the former Secretary of State for International Development for Britain and chairperson of the Cities Alliance, an intergovernmental advocacy organisation committed to meeting the UN target to abolish slums in cities across the globe.



2004

CLARE SHORT



# POLITICS

“If the circumstances of the 1970s and the 1980s called forth a militaristic formation of Tamil culture, the situation today requires the re-formation of political culture. We can only hope that the pressures operating on both sides will lead to a settlement. If peace is to endure, it is crucial that a pluralistic polity be built. An important step towards this end is the effective contestation of militarized constructions of Sinhala and Tamil ethnicity. While visions which contest militarism exist, attacks from ethnic extremists eroded the sub-cultures embodying these visions. These sub-cultures need to be revitalized. The growth of alternative visions of identity and citizenship should constrain those who might wish to continue to roar like lions and growl like tigers. Or rather, more people should learn that the beasts of the jungle coexist at least as often as they threaten or attack each other, even if they see themselves as lions or tigers. Some of the legacies of the long civil war and the terms on which it ends may hinder efforts to build alternatives to militarism. However, peace will only brighten the prospects of such alternatives. Besides, if such alternatives are not built, it would mean that the likes of Neelan died in vain. That cannot be.”

- From *'The Political Formation of Cultures: South Asian and Other Experiences'*

Narendra Subramanian is an Associate Professor of Political Science at McGill University. He studies the politics of ethnicity, nationalism, religion, gender and race, primarily in India.

2005

NARENDRA SUBRAMANIAN



# DEMOCRACY

“As I said earlier, I am prepared to argue that constitutional democracies will occasionally confront emergencies so grave that they will require the temporary suspension of some constitutional protections. It would be silly and ahistorical to try to imagine a world in which no such emergencies will ever occur. The important questions, however, all involve thresholds - how grave is the emergency, what protections must be suspended and why, and what is the evidence that such suspensions are in fact necessary and effective? One problem with these questions is they are not empirical. There are no objective, observable answers. And even if the answers can be approximated by guesswork or gut instinct, the answers are not static; the circumstances of any true emergency are continuously changing. So there are really only two ways to approach the correct answers under wartime pressure either you have consistently flawless leaders who make the ideal decisions on their own, or you have a noisy, inclusive, open debate in a democratic society about what constitutes a true emergency and what measures may be necessary to address that emergency.”

- From *'Terror and the Constitution: Notes From America after September 11'*

Steve Coll is the Dean and Henry R. Luce Professor of Journalism at the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism.



2006

STEVE COLL

# PROTECTION

“His [Neelan’s] loyalties weren’t to any closed, static version of state or nation or community. He understood very well what were the limits of state sovereignty, and the nature of sovereign state responsibilities. His central intellectual and political struggle was to help reinvent Sri Lankan politics beyond competing and defensive nationalisms, whether Tamil or Sinhalese, and his perspective in this was that of a genuine cosmopolitan, alive to the possibilities of what such a polity could contribute to the wider world, and to what the wider international community, provided it acted in a principled and consistent way, could contribute to peace and stability and development within this country. Neelan’s belief in the power of words and of ideas, his devotion to pluralism and democracy, his active defence of human rights and the rule of law, and his tireless work towards a peaceful, negotiated binding of his country’s agonizingly self-inflicted wounds, made him not only a great Sri Lankan, but a great international citizen – whose memory we celebrate on this day. His beliefs and principles, and his capacity to translate them into action, have never been more sorely needed, both here in Sri Lanka and in the wider global community.”

- From *‘The Limits of State Sovereignty: The Responsibility to Protect in the 21st Century’*

Gareth Evans is a former Australian Foreign Minister, and the former President and CEO of the International Crisis Group.

A close-up portrait of Gareth Evans, an older man with white hair, a goatee, and glasses, wearing a dark suit, white shirt, and dark tie. The background is a textured grey. In the top right corner, there is a teal circular graphic containing the year '2007' and the name 'GARETH EVANS' below it, separated by a horizontal teal line.

2007

GARETH EVANS

# GOVERNANCE

“The combination of the failure of the government and the market has led to distorted development in which the rich have become richer and the poor poorer. While the market invariably produces winners and losers, it has no responsibility for those who lose. Governments, on the other hand, have broad responsibility towards their citizens. Unlike the market, they cannot ignore the weak, the vulnerable, the unemployed, the sick, and the destitute. They have a responsibility towards all of them as the guarantor of social justice. The failure of the government to fulfill its role has raised serious questions about its credibility and legitimacy. However, the inability of government to tackle poverty is not due to any inherent defect of democracy but rather it is due to the weaknesses of political institutions and processes which have largely excluded the poor and vulnerable groups. The government must play a proactive role in ensuring that the poor do not get left out further...For democracies to fulfill their role as guarantor of social justice, the democratic institutions will need to become more inclusive. This calls for mobilization, community organization, advocacy, training, and the building of human capacity.”

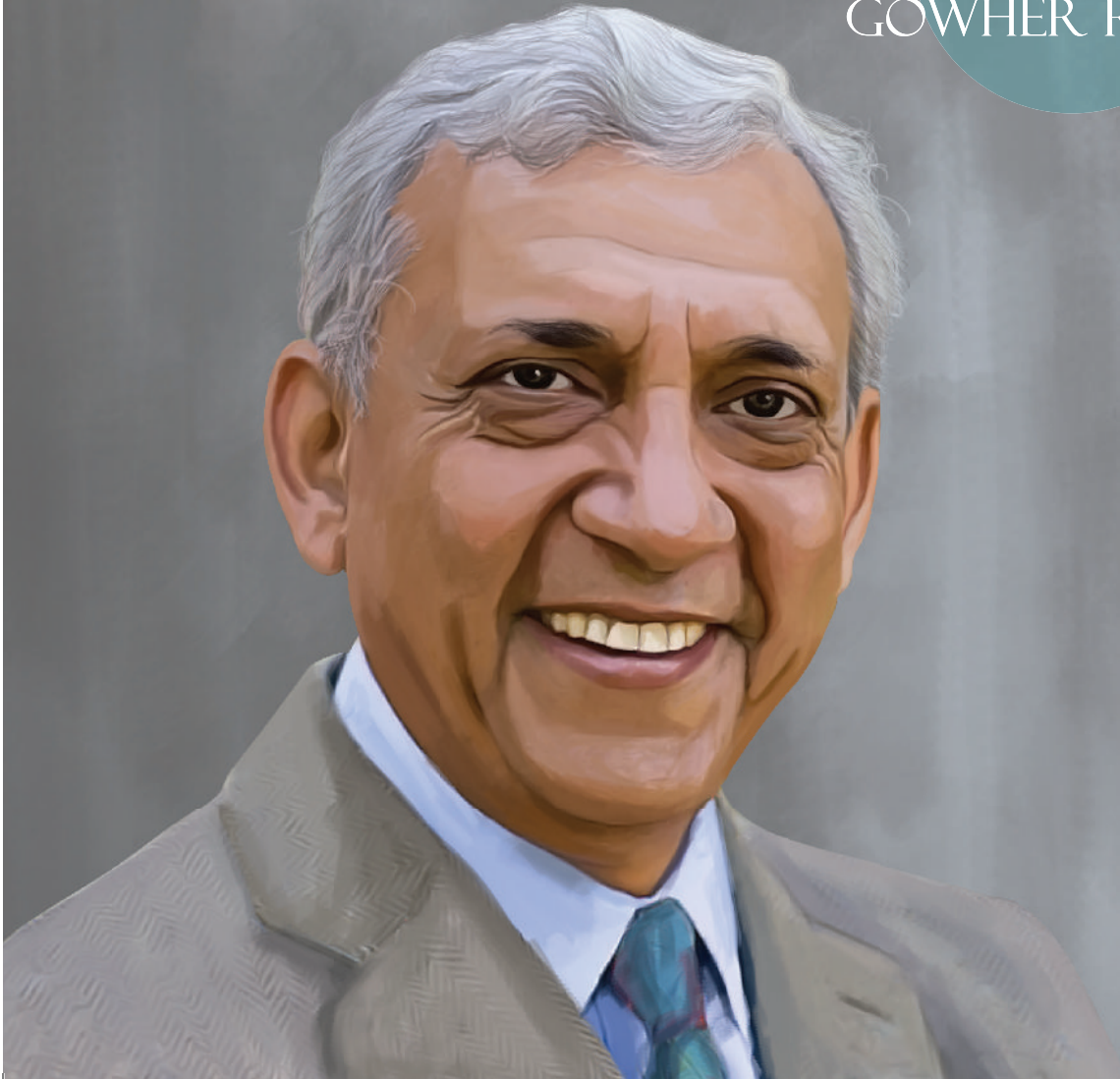
- From *‘Democracy and Development: Restoring Social Justice at the Core of Good Governance’*

Gowher Rizvi is the International Affairs adviser to the Prime Minister of Bangladesh.



2008

GOWHER RIZVI



*“In the very moment in which you felt most desperate and most depressed about what had happened, the death of this man, the very nature of your mourning taught me something, which is that there is a very strong civil society here, men and women of passion and goodwill who know an evil deed when they see it.”*

*Michael Ignatieff*

*Memorial Speaker, 2000*



# CONSTITUTIONALISM

“Well-beloved Neelan-san, you lived amidst the pursuit of a new dawn for Sri Lankan constitutionalism amidst its thousand sunsets. Yet, you never relinquished the responsibilities towards the tasks of memory and justice, because you made worthy the very idea of constitutionalism in terms of morally decent state and society orderings. For you, the tasks of the ‘rule-of-law’ theory and movement always signified making State incrementally ethical, power in state and civil society, in all its hidden habitats, more fully accountable/responsible, and governance progressively just.”

- From ‘Constitutional Utopias: A Conversation with Neelan Tiruchelvam’

Upendra Baxi is a legal scholar and former Vice-Chancellor of the University of Delhi. In 2011, he was awarded the Padma Shri, the fourth highest civilian award in India, by the Government of India.

2009

UPENDRA BAXI



# IDENTITIES

“The mid-twentieth century was a dramatic turning point in the histories of the countries of South Asia. It was the time of liberation from colonial rule which in many ways had unravelled the earlier past and left us somewhat bewildered about the future. There was the intoxication of freedom - the release from being a colony - but there was also the apprehension of having to define the nation-state that subsequently emerged. I can recall my final year in school when on the 15 August 1947 I was asked to hoist the flag of independent India. I gave my first public speech and it was inevitably on the anticipation of becoming a nation holding promise of a coming utopia. Gradually the reality became more visible. How were we as citizens of a new nation to define ourselves? All of us in South Asia, not to mention other ex-colonies, have faced the same questions. And among them was the question of identity or identities. We in India thought the answer was simple - it was the single identity of being Indian. But the reality on the ground has turned it into a complex question without a simple answer because even a single identity can subsume others. The utopias that we wished for have retreated in the face of identities in conflict.”

- From *‘Of Histories and Identities’*

Romila Thapar is an Indian historian who is Professor Emerita at the Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. She is the author of several books including the popular volume, *‘A History of India.’*

2010

ROMILA THAPAR



# SUSTAINABILITY

“Neelan was a citizen of Sri Lanka and of the world. But before country and globe, he belonged also to a city, the city where we are meeting today. The word citizen, says the Oxford English Dictionary, has its root in the Old French *citeain*, itself based on the Latin *civitas*, or ‘city.’ Now Colombo is one of many South Asian cities whose rapid recent growth has placed burdens on its social and environmental fabric. The expansion of Colombo, as of New Delhi, Karachi, Kathmandu, Dhaka, raises a series of serious questions for citizens and planners alike. How can we provide safe, secure, and pleasant housing for the different social classes in the city? What forms of transport will city residents use to commute to and from their workplace? Where will the water and energy to sustain them come from? Can one reconcile growth and development with environmental sustainability? And with aesthetics? In short, how can we make the lives of city residents more habitable, in all senses of the word?”

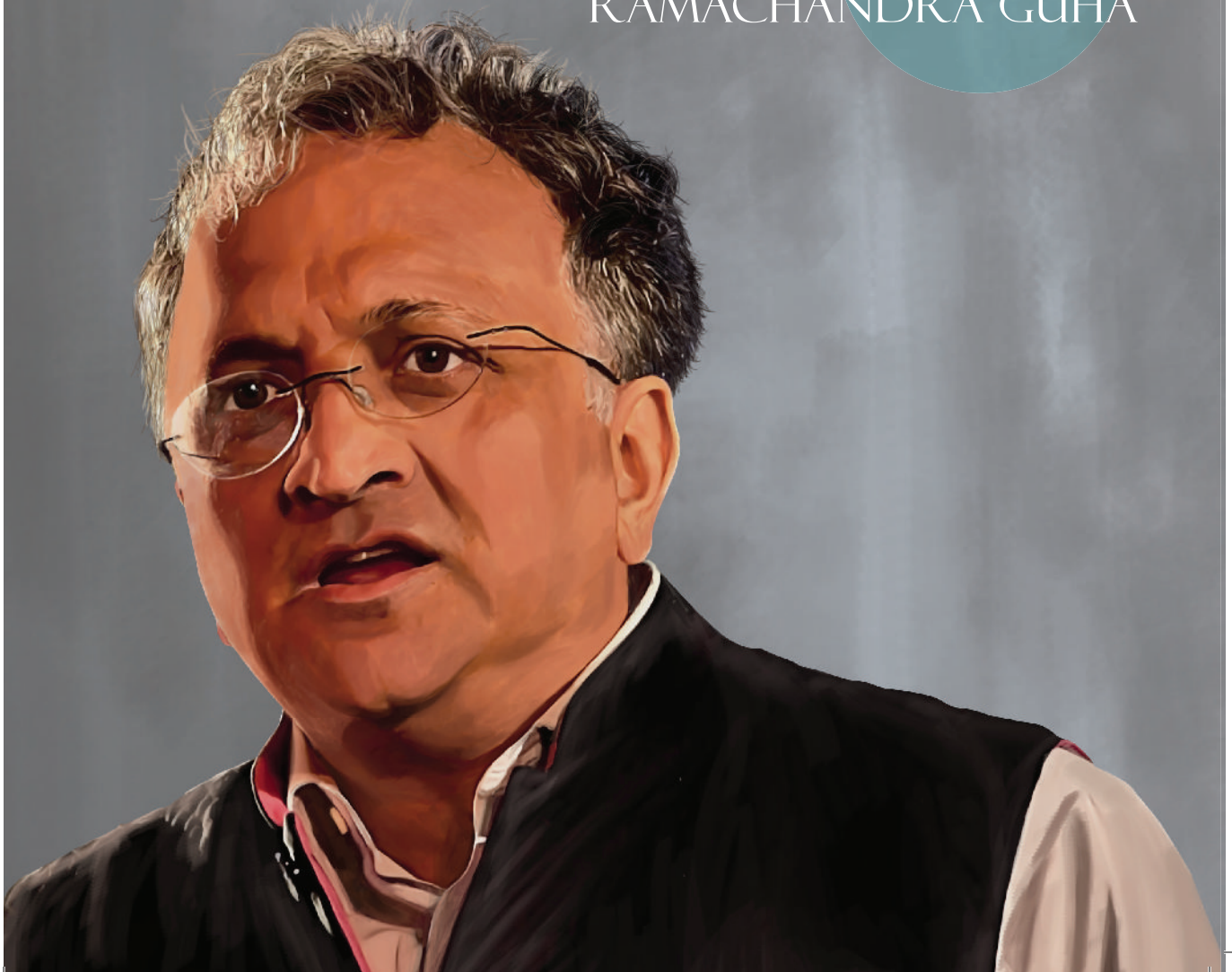
- From *‘Making South Asian Cities Habitable’*

Ramachandra Guha is a Historian, Biographer, Columnist, Environmentalist and the author of several notable books including *‘A Corner of a Foreign Field’* and most recently, *‘Gandhi: The Years That Changed the World.’*



2011

RAMACHANDRA GUHA



# DIVERSITY

“In a plural society as in any society a constitution must fill this regulative role. But in a plural society, a constitution must go further and constitute the very demos which governs itself through the constitutional regime. Because of a history of conflict, or a lack of a shared existence, the constitution is often the principal vehicle for the forging of a common political identity, which is necessary to make that constitutional regime work. The constitution can foster the creation of a common political identity by creating the institutional spaces for shared decision-making among members of different ethnic groups. Concrete experiences of shared decision-making within a framework of the rule of law, without recourse to force or fraud, can serve as the germ of a nascent sense of political community. The process of debating and negotiating a constitution, if conceptualized as an inclusive process, can also help to create the political community on whose existence the constitutional order which results from that process depends. A constitution can also constitute the demos by encoding and projecting a certain vision of political community with a view to altering the very self-understanding of citizens.”

- From *‘Constitutional Design in Plural Societies: Integration or Accommodation’*

*Sujit Choudhry is an educator, expert in comparative constitutional law and Director of the Center for Constitutional Transitions.*

NTT acknowledges that in 2016 Tyann Sorrell filed a lawsuit against Choudhry alleging sexual harassment. She stated she had complained to Berkeley University in 2015 which led to an internal investigation by the University that found that Choudhry had violated the University’s sexual misconduct policies. All lawsuits were settled in 2017, with Choudhry remaining a tenured faculty member of Berkeley Law until his voluntary resignation in 2018 as per the settlement. NTT is a rights-based organization which stands with survivors and their efforts to seek justice.

A professional headshot of a man with dark hair, wearing glasses, a white shirt, a blue tie, and a dark suit jacket. He is smiling slightly. The background is a plain, light grey color.

2012

SUJIT CHOUDHRY

# MEMORY

“*Antigone* has had an enduring hold on our imagination of justice. On any given day, the play is being performed somewhere in the world. Its great power is its ability, in Greek fashion, to be a Trojan horse for dissident political sentiment wherever it is performed. In places where communities have been refused a right to mourn their dead, *Antigone* has been a way to claim that right. In places where states have declared a hierarchy of loss that includes both privileged and dispensable victims, *Antigone* has been a way to claim a radical equality in death. In places where some lives have been declared ungrievable, *Antigone* has been a way to express that grief. In places where the aftermath of a civil war has been used to consolidate a ruler’s power, *Antigone* has been a way to contest the legitimacy of that authority. In places where a war’s victors have claimed an Orwellian right to declare an official truth and underwrite a new technology of control, *Antigone* has been a way to resist and revolt. In places where minority traditions have been thrown outside the city’s gates and condemned as a threat to the nation, *Antigone* has been a way to open those gates and reclaim the city. In places where dissent remains hesitant and underground, a whispered current, *Antigone* becomes a way to articulate protest.”

- From ““The Law, this Violent Thing” *Dissident Memory and Democratic Futures*’

Vasuki Nesiah is an Associate Professor of Practice at New York University, teaching human rights and law, and social theory.

2013

VASUKI NESIAH



*“The best and most fitting way to remember Neelan Tiruchelvam, and to honour his memory is to reject violence, embrace dialogue, negotiations and peace so that he and others will not have lived or died in vain.”*

*Alexander L. Borraine  
Memorial Speaker, 2002*



# TRUTH-SEEKING

“Now, more than 15 years from the heady days of this long dirty war, and ten years since we handed over the final report to the President, my shoulders are still weighed down by the stories of the men, women, and children that had to live through decades of total impunity. The eight thousand voices still occupy my head, and echo in my heart. So was it worth it? My answer is a resounding “Yes.” The effort to build a clear picture about the patterns of abuse on both sides is critical (not only for Timor-Leste, but also for Indonesia and the world.) Through analyses of its database we could make a finding about the pattern of violations, what proportion was committed by the Indonesian forces and the militia under its control, and what proportion was committed by the resistance. We were able to show international complicity, how short-term political interests clouded diplomacy. But in hindsight, I think we should have also focused more on efforts to practically transform the lives of victims and their communities. Without immediate material and social support for victims as well as strong dissemination in their communities, this acknowledgement quickly left a bitter taste. I think we learned the hard way that truth cannot be separated from repair that must take place in a concrete manner.”

*- From ‘Stone and Flower: Truth as a Foundation for Community Learning and Reconciliation’*

Galuh Wandita is a member of the Coalition for Justice and Truth (KKPK) and Director of Asia Justice and Rights.



2014

GALUH WANDITA



# PLURALISM

“The essential problem here is that human rights are designed as protections for individuals; they are not targeted at groups. The protections they provide are certainly important for members of minorities. If human rights are made effective they will be protected against arbitrary detention and arrest, they will be able to speak freely and practice their religion or their culture, they will be protected against discrimination in the workplace, and so forth. These are important safeguards. But minority groups typically also care a great deal about what I will call collective goods, and human rights are not so useful here. Depending on the kind of group we are talking about, they may care not just that they should be permitted to use their own language, but that their language should receive official recognition. They may want support for their culture or religion. In the form for example, in which that culture or religion is transmitted down to the next generation. They may have territorial claims, ideas about areas of land that they see as rightfully belonging to them and that they should therefore be allowed to control. They may care about the state’s symbols - about the flag or the national anthem or the kind of ceremony used to inaugurate the head of state. These are all collective goods in the sense that if they are going to be provided, they will be provided for the whole group and not for individual members.”

- From *‘Democracy in Plural Societies: Problems and Solutions’*

David Miller is a British political theorist and academic. He is Professor of Political Theory at the University of Oxford and an Official Fellow of Nuffield College, Oxford.

2015

DAVID MILLER



# JUSTICE

“You in Sri Lanka, like many other societies undertaking a transition, are addressing a number of important and interconnected issues: constitutional reform; economic development; combatting corruption; military and security reform; demilitarization; providing justice for the disappeared and their families; providing psychosocial and other support to victims; preventing ethnic conflict and ethnic violence. These are all inter-related - in other words, failing to address one will make it harder to address the others. Consequently, addressing each will assist in addressing the others. For example, if a new Constitution is created but nothing is done to address the violations of the past, then the prospects for constitutional legitimacy and stability are lessened. By the same token, if you address the violations of the past but do not change the institutions, systems and structures that allowed and even encouraged such violations to occur, then much of that work will be for naught... The reality is that a political agreement must include an agreement on accountability or it risks alienating important constituencies and thus lessens its legitimacy. An emphasis on a political agreement today without addressing justice may have short-term appeal, but in the long-term it will not be sustainable. Any political agreement today must take into account all elements of your transitional strategy.”

- From *“Difficult Issues, Strategic Choices: Crafting a Coherent Sri Lankan Transitional Justice Process”*

Ronald Slye teaches law at the Seattle University School of Law. He is an internationally recognized expert in international criminal law, transitional justice, and international human rights law.

2016

RONALD SLYE



# ACCOUNTABILITY

“The life of Neelan Tiruchelvam, as I slowly explore it through his acquaintances, people who worked with him and friends, seemed to be holding together different forms of thought practice, different fields and sensitivities. On the one hand, national level politics, human rights and civil society. On the other hand, a support for intellectual work, the arts and for culture. Moving across disciplinary borders and fields, I think it is something we share and the reason for this invitation. Importantly it is also about bridging local politics with regional and universal aspirations. That is the necessary reality of human rights work: to speak about the local situation in the language of the universal and also vice versa, to speak about universal aspirations in local languages. Those understanding the complexities and seeking to speak to them need to recognize both context and nuance; the histories, sense of fear, dignity and hopes of communities in struggle and some of the root causes of these struggles. The necessity and beauty of human rights work is that it must also transcend space and time, generate a sense of global conversation undertaken by civil society to develop the politics of those who are governed (not those of government) and inform political solidarity across and beyond borders.”

- From *‘Forensic Architecture: Space and Violence in Palestine and Beyond’*

Eyal Weizman is a Professor of Spatial and Visual Cultures at Goldsmiths and a founding Director of the Centre for Research Architecture at the Department of Visual Cultures.



2017

EYAL WEIZMAN

# DISSENT

“In 2011, I was the first musician from India in 37 years to travel and perform in Yarlpnam and the Nothern Provinces. In all my travels as a muscian, I think that was the most important journey. Travelling to Yarlpnam, Kilinochchi, Vavuniya and [taking] a detour to Mullaithivu, speaking to so many people, visiting the music college in Yarlpnam was all learning, so much learning. This affected me deeply and influenced and redrafted my thoughts on art. I still vividly remember one student at the Ramanathan School in Yarlpnam explaining to me how when the sirens went off warning them of a bomb, they would just go to the shelters and come back after 45 minutes to continue their dance class from where they had left it. This made me wonder about art and what it means to people. What does it offer? Yes, it is an identity marker but there is something more, not just an expression but a way of experiencing life. After that journey, for two years, we conducted a festival in Yarlpnam called “Svanabhava” bringing artists from India. It was quite amazing. More than 5000 people watched dancers and musicians over 2 days. All this emphasised the idea that culture is far more than identity; it is an experience and experience itself can be transformative.”

- From ‘The Liberal Vision Challenged’

*Thodur Madabusi Krishna, popularly known as TM Krishna or TMK, is a Carnatic music vocalist, writer and activist. He has received the prestigious Ramon Magsaysay Award in recognition of ‘his forceful commitment as artist and advocate to art’s power to heal India’s deep social divisions...’*



2018

T.M. KRISHNA



*“Neelan knew, that political will is never waiting in a cupboard to be found: it has to be nurtured and generated, campaigned for persistently and relentlessly.”*

*Gareth Evans*

*Memorial Speaker, 2003*



# DIALOGUE

“After he was killed I was beside myself with grief; friends from all over Israel arrived with food and drink and other little expressions of love. Because I ran a PR office in Tel Aviv at the time, journalists wanted to interview me. In retrospect, I can’t believe I spoke out so strongly so early on – telling the Israelis to get out of the occupied territories. The Parents’ Circle noticed what I was doing and its founder, Yitzhak Frankenthal, whose son had been kidnapped and murdered by Hamas in 1994, got in touch. The organisation soon became my lifeline. I realized that I shared the same pain as the Palestinian mothers in the group and that with our pain we could become the most effective catalyst for change. I saw then that I had a choice about what to do with my pain – to invest it in revenge or try to think creatively. Since then I have travelled the world, spreading the message of reconciliation, tolerance, and peace.”

*Robi Damelin’s son, David, was killed by a Palestinian sniper in 2002 while guarding a checkpoint near a settlement during his army reserve service. She speaks to Israeli and Palestinian audiences all over the world as the Israeli Spokesperson for the Parents Circle - Families Forum, to demand that reconciliation be a part of any peace agreement. She was named a 2015 Woman of Impact by Women in the World. She is the protagonist featured in the documentary ‘One Day After Peace.’*

2019

ROBI DAMELIN



# TRUTH-SPEAKING

“When I was released, it was the time of the Oslo Accords, and there was a great feeling of hope for a two-state solution. But it never happened because the politicians said we weren’t ready for it. I think if I hadn’t had such strong beliefs and principles, anger would have taken over. It wasn’t until 2005 that some of us who believed in non-violence started meeting in secret with former Israeli soldiers. We were meeting as true enemies who wanted to speak. The Israelis were refusing to fight, not for the sake of the Palestinian people, but for the sake of the morals of their society. We too were not acting to save Israeli lives, but to prevent our society from suffering more. It was only later that we both came to feel a responsibility for each other’s people.”

*Bassam Aramin lives in Anata in East Jerusalem. In 1985 at the age of 17, he was incarcerated and spent 7 years in Israeli jails between 1985-1992. He went on to study history and holds an MA in Holocaust studies from the University of Bradford, England. He became a member of the Parents Circle - Families Forum in 2007 after losing his 10 year old daughter Abir, who was killed by an Israeli border policemen in front of her school. Bassam devotes his time and energies to his conviction for a peaceful, non-violent end to the Israeli occupation of Palestine and to Israeli-Palestinian reconciliation.*

A professional portrait of Bassam Aramin, a man with short dark hair, wearing a dark blue suit jacket, a white dress shirt, and a light purple tie. He is smiling slightly and looking towards the camera. The background is a soft, out-of-focus grey. In the upper right corner, there is a teal circular graphic containing the year '2019' and a horizontal teal line below it, with the name 'BASSAM ARAMIN' written in white capital letters below the line.

2019

BASSAM ARAMIN

*“In more ways than one, he [Neelan] left us speechless. His absence will remain for me, I am certain, forever unthinkable; his face, unforgettable.”*

*E.Valentine Daniel  
Memorial Speaker, 2003*





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