

# PATHWAYS OF DISSENT

Tamil Nationalism in Sri Lanka

Edited by  
**R. CHERAN**

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## Painting the Artist's Self

### Location, Relocation and the Metamorphosis

*T. Shanaathanan*



**C**ulture is not just a reflection of economic and social structure. It is mediated at a variety of levels. It is mediated by the complexity and contradictory nature of the social groups in which it originates, it is mediated by the particular situation of its actual producers, and it is mediated by the nature of operation of aesthetic codes and conventions, through which ideology is transformed and in which it is expressed (Wolff 1981: 71). It seems to me that these brief observation place in context some of the configurations of the post-traditional art practice of Jaffna, I would like to address in this chapter. The emergence of an individual who identifies his/her self as artist and his/her intention as self-expression characterized a shift in the art practice in the post-colonial societies. This was influenced by the immense structural changes in the condition of artistic production. The introduction of alien aesthetic codes and conventions and the institution for dissemination of such conventions through art schools, and the development of modern institutions of artistic mediation such as museums, commercial galleries and publishing houses were the prime factors, which contributed to the shift from

traditional art practices to post-traditional art practices.<sup>1</sup> Since these changes were initiated and influenced by the colonial culture, these activities of art-making and conception centred on the colonial urban and more specifically the urban elite space. Therefore, as in the West, the post-traditional art practice became an urban phenomenon, and the urban experience and particularly nostalgia were important in shaping the cultural dynamics of diverse post-traditional movements and trends. So it is very natural that Colombo became the institutionalized centre for post-traditional art practice in Sri Lanka.

But what is interesting to me here is that apart from Colombo, and unlike any other regions in Sri Lanka, Jaffna, which is not a fully urban site and is a middle-class-dominated society, has been a place for post-traditional art production. Therefore, the question here is how Jaffna remains a site for such art production even when such conditions are lacking. By addressing the question in this preliminary work, I would like to sketch the emergence of the artist's self by locating it in the changing socio-political situation and read the intention of the exhibitionary styles of this artist's works. In the process of reading the complexities of the artist's self-making in the post-traditional Jaffna society, I argue that in the absence of institutional support, popularity and material benefits, the notion of art practice is associated with the construction/reconstruction of artist's own self-identity and the ecstasy of caring for that identity; therefore, being an artist became a political decision and political act rather than a professional choice in post-colonial Jaffna.

#### IDENTITY—ART, ARTIST AND NATION

It has long been recognized that the developments of the conception of the artist is a historical and culturally specific phenomenon (Tanner 2003). The notion of the individual artist, which emerged during the Renaissance period and later culminated with the avant-garde in late 19th century Europe, was introduced into our local expressive culture through colonial intervention. This changed the status of the artist and his/her self-perception as an unique individual who was no longer prepared to be bound by social conventions but followed his/her own destiny in the relentless pursuit of an artistic ideal (Mitter 1994: 13). In a way, the emergence of the artist as

enterprising individual is associated with the change in patronage, mode of practice and shifts in the meaning of art. On the other hand, colonialism took art away from the bounds of tradition and its caste hierarchy, and embedded it in the newly emerged middle-class society. Since the whole process of this individualization in art is associated with the comprehensive package that sought to reproduce the cultural values of the West during the colonial Raj, it also directly or indirectly associated with the national consciousness of the locals. As Geeta Kapur (1995b) points out, there is indeed a chronological fix between nationhood and modernity and both may stand in for a quest of self-hood, for Indian or third-world artists, even the tasks of subjectivity are unsolved and require acts of allegorical exegesis often via the nation. Further, Thapati Guha observed that the colonial encounter brought into being a new social entity—the artist—with the heightened self-awareness about individual identity and nationality. She further stated that it also produced a special discursive and institutional space for art in middle-class society. Together, both 'art' and artist (in their new privileged status and modernized conception) became important agent in the articulation of national sovereignty and middle-class cultural hegemony (Thakurta 1995). So, in short, the agency of arts in nation-building paved the way for the recognition of this newly emerged self-identity of the artist. Hence, in the larger quest of nationalism, carving of the artist's self identity cannot be simplified as an individualizing current of modernism or an attempt to, cerebrally, making personal pictorial idiom, but evolves from the recognition of subjectivity that is embedded in new collective consciousness.

#### TRADITION AND TRANSFORMATION

In the caste-hierarchical traditional Jaffna, the production and consumption of art was governed by the caste system. Even though there was no caste that was directly associated with the production of painting, it was seen by the dominant Vellala men as a work done by Panjakammalars, Pandarams and women. Therefore, within the system of caste, the artist was submerged in his community identity and there was no question of individual identity. Hence, the status and the role of particular artist/artisan are governed by his/her caste position rather than his ability or merit.<sup>2</sup>

The first written evidence on colonial Jaffna paintings appeared in the leaflets of the modern Tamil Saiva revivalist Arumuga Navalar (1822–1879). In that, Navalar followed the steps of Protestant missionaries and called for a total ban on all wall paintings and painted images, which he described as nude and erotic (Kailasapillai 1996: 79). Navalar's views based on Protestant puritan ideals may have influenced the dominant Saiva Vellalar middle class in the reframing of the idea of painting, and also encouraged them to maintain a psychological distance in production and consumption of it. But this situation slightly changed when art became a school subject and art teaching became a government job through English education and through the widespread Hindu iconic and mythological oleograph prints of South Indian painter Raja Ravi Varma.<sup>3</sup>

As part of the colonial Raj's progressive package, art was introduced as a subject in schools, teacher's training colleges and technical college.<sup>4</sup> Art education based on Victorian academic realism replaced the traditional aesthetics and art practice. The new Victorian ideal of representation, the new avenues of learning and the new job opportunities in art teaching opened the way for high-caste middle class' entry into this field without giving up their caste identity. The high-caste middle class' entry into the field of art in most cases aimed to gain a government job in teaching with a good pension and job security, which was the middle-class aspiration and anxiety, rather than an ambition of becoming an artist. But undoubtedly, there were a few teachers with the ambition of practicing painting and they were the pioneers in the process of reframing the notion of the artist's identity. Therefore, English education not only profoundly altered art practice into a secular activity based on the individual talent, but also uprooted the painting from its caste base and replanted it in a new class order. This adoption of painting within the middle class because of anxiety aspirations is an important turn in understanding the dynamics of post-colonial art practice in Jaffna.

#### WINSOR ART CLUB AND THE FIRST GENERATION OF INDIVIDUAL ARTISTS

The cultural activities of 1930s in Jaffna were fashioned by ideals of Indian nationalist movement and Bengal cultural revivalism. Visits of

Mahatma Gandhi in 1928 and Rabindranath Tagore in 1934 to Jaffna had direct impact on the emergence and the activities of modern cultural organizations such as Kalanilayam (1930), Vishvakarma Society (1931), North Ceylon Music Society (1932), and Sangeetha Samajam (1933), that revitalize and popularize the 'classical' art tradition among the educated middle class. In the same period the secretary of Kalanilayam, "Kalaipulavar" Navaratnam, followed the lines of Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, put the art historical writings in the service of the nation building project. Kalaipulavar's writings on Indian/Sri Lankan/Tamilian art heritage in a way encouraged the educated middle class to appropriate their modern identity in their 're-invented' past, and connected the 'new' art discourse with national imagination.

Appointment of artist, C.F. Winzer as an inspector Art in the Department of Education Ceylon contributed to a paradigm shift in art practice and art education. He established Ceylon Art Club in 1922 in Colombo to challenge the pseudo-academism that the colonial state patronized—Ceylon Society of Art. As a member of the Ceylon Art Club, S.R. Kanagasabai (S.R.K.), an Art Inspector of Education for Northern Sri Lanka, inspired by the Winzer's approach and ideals, established Winzer Art Club in 1938 in Jaffna. Although, the prime aim of this association was to modernize the art practice, paradoxically since most of its members were art teachers, it concentrated more on art education. Hence, art teachers, like K. Kanagasabapathy and Ambalavanar Rasiyah, who trained under S.R.K. in Winzer Art Club, became the first generation of painters. Later, K. Kanagasabapathy got further training in Colombo Technical College in painting. The earlier works of S.R.K, K. Kanagasabapathy, Ambalavanar Rasiyah and K. Rajaratnam, include portrait, still life and landscape studies in a realistic style of painting. As an interesting turn in the history, the '43 group' the first most significant artist collective in post-traditional Sri Lanka came into existence in the same period and S.R.K. and K. Kanagasabapathy exhibited their works with this group (Krishnaraja 1997). This may have contributed to the stylistic shift from academic realism to the Parisian modernism in the works of the first generation of Jaffna painters. As Mitter (1994: 10) argues in Indian context, this radical stance against the academic salon, closely identified with colonialism and the European avant-grade, was welcomed in South Asia as being more in sympathy with the oppressed.

## HOLIDAY PAINTERS GROUP

The Winsor art club came to an end in 1955 with the death of S.R.K. In 1959, the Holiday painters group was founded by a group of artists and art teachers and included A. Mark, M.S. Kandaih, S. Ponnambalam and K. Selvanathan (Krishnaraja 1997: 6). The activities of this group are significant in two ways:

1. It trained the young generation in the fields of painting and sculpture during the school vacation and holidays. Some of the students of this group later followed advanced studies in the Colombo Technical College.
2. It helped to sustain the creative impulse of artists who served as schoolteachers by providing common studio space during holidays and organizing art exhibitions.

Initiations of the Holiday painters group provided the stepping stone for the development of art in the 1980s.

## ART OF THE 1980S

Jaffna became the epicentre for the heightened phase of political and cultural activity after the anti-Tamil riots in 1983 in southern Sri Lanka. State suppression, the rise of Tamil nationalism and the emergence of militant politics led to the armed struggle to safeguard the Tamils aspirations and the Tamil homeland. In 1987, with the occupation of the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF), the situation became more explosive and complicated. As in politics, youth were in the forefront of cultural production, with cultural and students wings of various militant groups and the University of Jaffna. They participated with intense courage and dedication. The search for the 'new' and 'men of merit' was the dominant sentiment within the intensity of Tamil consciousness in the political, intellectual and aesthetic activities of this period.

This was a time of revivalism in drama and literature. Links created by the rebels movements and cultural activists through the Palk Strait, with Tamil Nadu, brought the flavour of art of Madras modern



movement and modern Indian art, through publications and prints to the Jaffna coast. During the same time, in Madras, an exhibition was organized by Tamil Nadu artists V. Santhanam and Sam Adaikalasamy based on the Welikada massacre and the 1983 riots. Later, a collection of Santhanam's drawing was also published by one of the Eelam Tamil rebel groups. The developments in politics and the artistic exposure became path-setters to the development of art in Jaffna.

The first venture in 1980s in painting came with the exhibition by three young women artists who were trained under A. Mark and Sivapragasam. This was organized by the cultural group of Jaffna University in 1986 and it included the works of Arunthanthi, Suguna and Nirmala. This exhibition exhibited a progressive structural change in the art scene, first, it marked the entry by a group of artists who were not art teachers, second, the entry of women artists bearing the identity of artist and, third, as it generated an overwhelming response and support from the progressives. It created an atmosphere of recognition for artists and painting, which I would say was something equal to rebels and the struggle for freedom during that time. Interestingly, paintings of the Jaffna post-traditional artists were on display at the exhibitions organized by various militant groups in order to display the nation. This also indicates how the realities of war started to deconstruct the ordinary Jaffna middle-class psyche. It evoked enthusiasm among the youths to study art. But unfortunately, the only available institution in Sri Lanka to study art, the Institute of Aesthetic Studies (IAS) in Colombo, had completely changed its medium of instruction into Sinhala in 1976, thus denying the rights of Tamils to study visual art. In this context, the Holiday painters group got momentum and A. Mark was reinvented by the group of young students and little magazines.

Mark's paintings and his activities symbolized a transitional phase in the post-traditional Jaffna painting and the dilemmas of a post-traditional painter. Starting as a realistic painter and a schoolteacher, Mark in the 1980s localized the pictorial styles of modernist, especially of Picasso, George Keyt and the Indian painters like Jamini Roy and Satish Gujral by handling local themes, through which he gained popularity and established the modern pictorial mode and individual artist against the popular academic realism, schoolteachers and sign board painters.<sup>5</sup> In a way, Mark's formalistic approach preoccupied with the idea of portraying the Tamil nation, more specifically the

making of his own identifiable pictorial style, figured the solidification of new Tamil identity that was not only based on the cruelties of war but also on the past. Through his paintings on history, mythology and literature he reinvented and reconstructed the past to suit the present need. In a way, Mark in his paintings wants to be 'traditional' and 'authentic' and at the same time 'modern' and 'different'. This is the dilemma shared by the most of post-traditional painters of this region.

Unlike any other artist of Jaffna, through his well-articulated talks and free art lessons, Mark managed to influence a good number of young artists and gain popularity among the art lovers. Paintings of the young painters like Arunthathi, Vasuki, Kailasanathan and Nilanthan were sharply divided from their own past and the Colombo art scene in terms of approach and content. These youngsters dismissed the popular idea of painting as beautiful, pleasurable and spiritual entity by handling themes such as disappearance, violence, struggle and freedom. During these years, art became a weapon to attack social injustice and an asylum for individuals who were forced to spend their teenage years in the presence of war. In their paintings, artists expressed their optimism and sympathies towards the Tamil nation and their agitation against state suppression in an instant direct manner. With the artist of the 1980s, the consciousness of the artist as a political individual came to the surface of art production. On the other hand, by the end of the 1980s, the whole notion of art making was preoccupied with the act of style making. Like in the high phase of modernism, style became the indicator of an artist's individual identity and in the local context it was also associated with the national or ethnic identity.

Apart from the Holiday painters group there were some individuals active in art production in the 1980s. M. Kanagasabai (b. 1925) from the first generation of painters, activated by the sea of changes in 1980s, started working on his memory and the nostalgia for the past. In his paintings, Kanagasabai documented the various aspects of cultural life which is in the stage of vanishing due to war and social change. Asai Rasiah (b. 1946), a victim of 1983 Colombo riots, resettled in Jaffna. His approach to painting falls into two categories—his landscape paintings have been approached in a romantic way while his figurative works have a social realistic sentiment in it. His refusal to do his earlier art teacher job and the decision to face the hardship

of being a full-time painter make us realize that his paintings are the images of the artist's romantic self.

## ART OF THE 1990S

The situation created by the withdrawal of the Indian Peace Keeping Force, the battle for the Jaffna fort, expansion of military's high security zones into civilian areas in Palaly and Kankesanthurai and the naval control of the surrounding islands of Jaffna peninsula uprooted the age-old settlements from their soil. This led to an abnormality where most of the local inhabitants became refugees in their own land and people of different regions, histories and memories were forced to share a limited area within the peninsula. This created, what I would say, a collaged community and that was further stretched by the immigrations towards Colombo and Western countries, and later by the mass exodus in 1995 which, according to the Jaffna government agent's report, displaced 500,000 people from their own land. This history of displacement and refugees alters the way in which one experiences his/her own surroundings and therefore, his/her own self. Members of the same family having different nationalities, people of the same nationalities psychologically living in different geographical sites and even in the case of holding a permanent citizenship in an expatriate country these expatriates identify themselves as Sri Lankan/Eelam Tamils; this seemed normal. Therefore, the categories of identities based on nationality, geographical territory, collective history and memory became unreal and the co-existence of conflicting categories and space became real. In this context, the older consciousness of belonging and recognition that construct the notion of Tamil nation was replaced by the realities of surreal and collage. This feeling of mismatch constitutes common, mundane experience in which the new consciousness of the self is rooted. It seems to me now that in the absence of earlier categories of collective identities, despite of all differences, the agency of making the nation is relocated in the plain of pain, suffering and nostalgia of individual as a victim. As Ernest Renan (1996: 81) explains, 'What one really understands is despite differences in having suffered together—indeed common suffering is greater than happiness.' On the other hand, collapse of social structure, and censorship of various kinds of different political and armed groups

forced the artistic imagination to take more a introvert journey. In this context, artist's personal history and metaphorical narrations gained prominence.

Many of the younger generation of artists of the 1980s migrated to Western countries and India for political, economical and educational reasons in the 1990s. These migrations changed the societal socialization of these artists and opened possibilities in art training, and new exposure to the art world which creates new challenges. Self-investigation and the meaning of identity in a war or exile situation became a prime issue in the pluralistic approaches of the 1990s in painting. R. Vaidhehi, who is now living in India, in her works, questions the notion of identity in Sri Lanka's ethnically polarized society and sees how the Tamil identity is exchanged, valued, devalued and handled by the Sri Lankan state as paper documents, through the collages of various documents, identity cards, police registration, and so on, that are necessary to live as a Tamil in any part of Sri Lanka. She shows how we live in a world of collages of documents and how one's inner individuality is being erased and denied through the process of proving or defining one's own physical self and location. The works that she did in India depict the mindscape of a stranger in a jungle of buildings. In most of Vaidehi's recent works, one can notice that the images become more and more like her self-portrait and have an innate feeling of loneliness and strangeness.

Social anomalies configured as personal myths and narratives in Shanaathanan's surrealist landscapes. By personalizing history and mythology, he metaphorically plays with the 'personal' and the 'public'. This approach is a sharp contrast to the approach of earlier generation of painters who objectified history and mythology as the identity of nation His paintings and etchings express the pain and suffering of being a suspect and a stranger in his own society in the absence or uncertainty of home. In his paintings too, his own body becomes the site of reference for chaos of the society, as Foucault explains, the body is the 'site' in which all forms of repression are ultimately registered (as quoted in Harvey 1990: 45). His recent works explore the relationship between the construction of identity and both physical and psychological location by sometimes recoiling and sometimes juxtaposing the human anatomy and maps of different kinds. To depict the collaged society and the dislocation of the self, he uses collaged and tailored maps. His paintings can be seen as the visible

or invisible presences of the painter's own self as an eyewitness of the social calamities.

Sivaruban's paintings also express the helpless, victimized, lonely self in a surreal situation. If Shanaathanan brings the surreal nature to his painting by juxtaposing the unreal together, Sivaruban brings that with the play of scale and proportions of different images and their schematic relationship that produces forms as idiosyncratic and undigested. Therefore, in the works of Vaidehi, Shanaathanan and Sivaruban, there is an autobiographical attitude. The following observation on 1990s Sri Lankan art of Jegath Weerasinghe comes close to locating the works of these artists.

The interesting thing is that what happens here is the alignment of personal pains with those of the society and this, the artist portrays himself/herself as the suffering individual on behalf of others implying a self-inflicted vicarious punishment. Consequently, these are collections of art that shows subtle, but strong signs of autobiographical narratives. These autobiographical narratives usually hold or tell us of a character that is desolate and dismal yet sanguine, or of a character that is struggling with some sort of bondage, a captivity, and a perplexity whose location and position is not yet defined, but is being defined. (Weerasinghe 2004)

Nanda Kandasamy (Canada) and Anusiya (Ireland) reinforce the notion of home as a form of relationship, connections, sharing and for them, home is not the land in which they live now, but the land they lost or were made to lose. Nanda Kandasamy's one work was made out of collaging the letters that he received from home during the high time of war. Letters were the only mode of communication available during the time of war and that too with lots of constraints and delays. This personal material is made into public, by the process of art making. For Anusiya, the unbroken infinite lines in her minimalist drawing represent her thread of connection with the home that is uprooted, stolen, dislocated and destroyed.

Arunthathi's and Vasuki's works try to build women's identity by exploring the role of women in a male-dominated world and art practice. Arunthathi works like a woman folk artist and tries to juxtapose her deep inclination towards traditional designs with the representation of subtle moments of living. Her approaches give a feminine nature to her paintings. Unlike Arunthathi's effortless free line-based works, Vasuki's paintings make a political statement. They show us how

Vasuki, as a self-conscious woman, reads her own self and the world. While the formalism of 1980s continues in the works of Kailasanathan, Nilanthan and Karuna (Canada), most of the other artists' works of the 1990s exhibit a drastic change in approach and the quality of expression. Earlier direct, literal expression gives way to nuance and layers of feeling in which mundane and ordinary became important. In short it moves from the meta-narratives of Sri Lankan and then Tamil nationalism to a layer of experiencing the ordinariness of them. This leads to a situation where the conscious effort of search for personal pictorial style gives way to accepting and realizing the artist's own self and ways that are being made visible. Here, understanding the process of constructing the self and the identity became the main concern of these artists. Here, the act of art making became more important than the finished product. Therefore, I argue that the medium of collage, which most of artists practiced in the 1990s use metaphoric and symbolic functions as a vehicle of expression and the meaning or in other words, functions both as signifier and signified. At the end of the 1990s, the University of Jaffna started a degree course in art and design with lots of hope and hardship in addition to the art history discipline, which was introduced with the revivalism of the 1980s.

## CONCLUSION

In their research on artistic careers and the labour markets, social scientists point out that the artistic career is risky and poorly paid (Alexander 2003: 134). In his book on north and east Sri Lankan economy, Nithiyanandam observes that in the failure of establishing the colonial economic structure of northern and eastern parts of Sri Lanka on cash crops, as in the case of southern Sri Lanka by the colonial Raj, the introduction of education was linked with the catering to the government employment market in Jaffna, which placed professions like doctors and engineers on the top (Nithiyanandam 2003). The foregoing observations help us to understand the status and the role of the 'insecure' artist in the Jaffna middle class. Further, in post-traditional societies individualization of artist is also associated with commercialization and commodification of art work. In post-colonial societies it also directly or indirectly is connected with emerging nationalist sentiments. Even though a few of the artists

whom I have discussed earlier partly operate with the galleries outside Jaffna and manage to sell their works, most of the others are still away from the art mediators. The situation is not much different even in the case of Jaffna painters who live abroad. Since most of them still identify themselves as artists of Jaffna, and each of them lives in isolation in various parts of the world, their activities and art production stay away from the general artistic culture of the country they live in. Therefore, it seems to me that being an artist in the Jaffna community itself is a quite rebellious act. As Suzi Gablik observed that being an artist has always meant maintaining a certain independence of mind and not adapting to competitive performances required for well-being under the established system even at the cost of intense personal sacrifice (Gablik 1984: 70). The foregoing observations well place in context my argument that the intention behind art production in Jaffna is consciously or unconsciously associated with the idea of framing/reframing the identity of artist's individual, rather than material benefits, fame and hobby. Stuart Hall says that cultural identities are the points of identification, the unstable points of identification or suture, which are made within the discourses of history and culture. Not an essence, but a *positioning*. Hence, there is always a politics of identity, a political position (Hall 1996: 113). The political position of the Jaffna artist's self is more closely linked with the political development in Sri Lanka, than with the developments in the field of art. The first generation of artists displaying the dual identity emerged from the conflict of colonialism and nationalism, by deploying the Victorian ideals to portray the local scenes. The second generation positions art in an anti-colonial stand, which they did by reinventing the tradition and other anti-colonial modes of expression. In the early phase of Tamil nationalism, artists tried to imbibe some of the attitudes of Indian and Sri Lankan counterparts by relocating the styles and themes of past for their present need. Interestingly the younger generation of artists from the 1990s pluralistic approach move away from the nationalist romantic imaginative narration of past. The true realities of civil war which this generation was forced to face, made them rethink the earlier notion of identity and the process of making them visible. This made them focus on their present. Paradoxically, the deepening consciousness of identity, in society in general and the artist in particular, coincided with the loss of earlier categories of identity based on collective history, memory,

geographical territory and nationality in Tamil society due to war and displacements. This leads to the situation of identity similar to Harvey's explanation on the post-modern situation: the co-existence in an impossible space of large number of fragmentary possible worlds or more simply incommensurable spaces that are juxtaposed or superimposed upon each other (Harvey 1990: 48). This location of the artist's self in a collided, -dislocated, collaged space influences the ceaseless metamorphosis of artistic image into surrealist image.

## NOTES

1. John Clark, in his article on Asian Modernisms, argued that modernity invents itself everywhere; it is required for a new relativization of the pasts of any given culture or group of culture. The principal condition is that these cultures need to and are incapable of carrying out this relativization (quoted in Weerasinghe 2000). Hence, to avoid the confusion by using the word 'modern', I am here using it as post-traditional.
2. According to Jeremy Tanner the concept status describes the position of an actor within the social structure, in particular insofar as this position is ranked as superior or inferior to other positions. The concept of role describes patterned expectations about and performance of action by groups of actors interacting with each other (Tanner 2003: 107).
3. Raja Ravi Verma (1848–1906) is a prime aspiration in the Indian artists' passage to the modern; he is at the same time an obvious anachronism of the period. Handling this contradiction with poise, he joins the ranks of the anomalous figures in India's 19th century cultural renaissance who see their task in the same terms—of materializing through Western techniques, the idea of a golden past and then inducting this into a national project (Kapur 1995a).
4. According to the Exhibition Catalogue (2000) made by IAS. The earliest inception, of course in Drawing and Painting, was at the Maradana Technical College in 1896. In 1949 the art courses were moved to a new house at Horton place known as Haywood. In 1952, the art courses were formally constituted within an institute titled Government College of Arts. It gained its current university status in 1974 under the name of Institute of Aesthetic Studies (IAS). Until recent times, this was the only art institution in Sri Lanka to study visual arts.
5. Modern artists, sign board painters, illustrators, commercial artist, cartoonists and art teachers were all treated same, without considering the different intentions and needs behind them, under the common label 'artist' in the early writings on Jaffna painting. It also symbolically presents the popular conception of art and the artist in Jaffna society.

