

# **DISCRIMINATING AGAINST EXCELLENCE: ABUSES IN RECRUITMENT PRACTICES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF JAFFNA**

## **SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

- The Subcommittee for Academic Integrity of the Jaffna University Science Teachers' Association found blatant, endemic abuse across several university departments and units in the selection of academic and non-academic staff. The root of this abuse is both political and personal patronage which operates at all levels of the system, and an unwillingness of senior professors and the administration to challenge it, and of the UGC to fulfil its responsibilities in the selection of able and independent Council members and in the regulation of the administration of universities
- The most prevalent form of abuse documented is in the selection of probationary lecturers (or assistant lecturers), resulting in the most highly qualified candidates such as First Class degree-holders being systematically excluded from consideration or denied positions.
- We also found evidence of systematic abuse and political manipulation for non-academic staff appointments for Computer Applications Assistants (CAA) and Labourers. Favours were given to labourer candidates that were denied to highly qualified lecturers whose services the university badly needs.

### **We recommend:**

1. That all cases where complaints have been filed be reviewed swiftly and highly qualified applicants that were excluded at interviews be called. To guard against retaliation, applicants who have filed complaints should have their cases heard by a special review board appointed in consultation with the Unions.
2. That independent persons of repute with an appreciation of university values should be appointed to the Council as external members, and student representatives and academic staff must be allowed to review their qualifications. Internal members of the Council should be advised to resign their positions and seek a fresh mandate from their constituencies in the Senate and Faculties. This means starting on a fresh slate where the more independent internal members are not inhibited from speaking out; indeed part of their new mandate must be speaking out against cases of abuse or political manipulation.

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*The Subcommittee for Academic Integrity, Jaffna University Science  
Teachers' Association*

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **Excluding Merit**

Sri Lanka is a country beset with challenges that require commitment, ingenuity, and an ability to think outside the box in order to address them. Sri Lanka's universities should be at the forefront of addressing the country's needs, and the first defense of the communities they serve. Instead, the University of Jaffna appears to be playing the game of those who are deliberately debasing and destroying intellectual life in the North. There is a culture of mediocrity at the University and a fear of striving for excellence, because to do so is to think critically and outside of predetermined social and political structures. An important aspect of the problem is a heavily politicised atmosphere, an absence of collegiality, and paucity of discussion in the University as a whole. Departmental lectures and seminars rarely happen. Outside lectures are scarce. Most students and staff are not motivated to read outside their set work. In some departments, readings are not even assigned and lecturers read from the same notes year after year. Students are not expected to think critically but to copy the lecturer's notes. A university anywhere else in the world is a place where one hears about books from friends and fellow colleagues, and students are recommended books to read by their fellow students and teachers. Yet in some parts of the University of Jaffna, teachers complain that students won't read, and so comply by not giving them anything to read—in any language. In turn students complain that to read outside the lecturers' notes would penalise them. The University badly needs genuine scholars and teachers with broader interests to help bring about a lively and learned atmosphere.

The care the University gives to the recruitment of young academics determines its future. This is the point at which the University invests in a promising and upcoming scholar with a view to its future development. Those who have gone through our programmes, worked hard and performed with credit should be treated with respect and be encouraged to think and act freely. Yet the positive development of talented young academics at the University is precluded by certain conditions: namely a corrosive culture of political favoritism and cronyism. The University has a reputation for having favourites lined up and blocking good scholars; good scholars aspiring to serve can be dismissed without any courtesy or token of gratitude. In contrast, talented applicants for university positions have to be engaged in a forthright manner, and given assurance that their qualifications will be fully and objectively assessed, and that the selection process is fair.

Too frequently, as this report shows, our young graduates who excel in their fields are treated with contempt and made to doubt their ability and worth. This is because sycophancy towards those in authority, rather than merit, is the route to academic employment, When those earning

first class honors are frequently bypassed by selection boards for second class candidates, the entire marking system fails to have meaning, Recruitment in a healthy university must give priority to academic merit, which is what primarily matters in teaching and research. Evaluation schemes that sidetrack merit in the recruitment of probationary lecturers invariably introduce objectionable subjective criteria that serve as license to favouritism by those who wield authority.

The role of the Vice-Chancellor in formalizing these trends for the whole University can be seen in the “Assessment Sheet for Recruitment of Lecturer/Lecturer (Probationary)” circulated by her office for the observation of faculty heads on 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2014. Out of 100 points it allows a maximum of 16 for “Academic Qualifications and Subject Knowledge.” A full 60 points is assigned to fifteen items for things like “Attitudes,” “Emotional Intelligence,” “Body Language,” “Eye Contact,” “Voice and Modulation,” and “Ability to Work under Stress.” “Integrity” gets a mere 3. A scheme of recruitment, which envisages that even a discerning selection board will do justice to these 20 items in the 15 minutes given to a candidate, cannot be serious. It is a ploy that legitimizes favouritism by providing a flimsy rationale for rejecting First Class degree-holders and award-winning job candidates. To downplay a candidate’s four-year undergraduate performance certified by several lecturers by allowing the overwhelming weightage to non-academic subjective criteria is only to justify and legitimize the university’s preference for mediocre and underqualified candidates. There is greater interest on the part of competent scholars in joining the University than we are led to believe. The University should go out of its way to attract quality.

We see a correlation between the health of departments and the importance they give to merit in appointments. Where deans and heads eloquently advance criteria that devalue merit, the results of their recruitment are highly dubious, leading to demoralisation and dissension among the staff.

## **The Political Nexus**

In order that a strong sense of fairness prevails in the affairs of the University, young academics must have their say in the running of the University and should not feel penalised for doing so. Such freedom must be structurally enshrined and protected. This weakness has prevailed for a long time, particularly because the governing Councils, especially the majority of the external members, who are appointed by the UGC (which in practice acts as a rubber stamp for those in political authority) have been disinclined to act on academic principle and in the best interests of the University. The selection of the Vice Chancellor has largely depended on them. It is hard for junior academics to have their voice heard as the Act does not give them a tangible role, unless they were ready to organise and prevail on those in authority. But the system for many years past was not a disaster. Frequently enough we have had good vice chancellors.

This changed drastically under the SLFP in all universities, though under the earlier President, there was great mindfulness of the written law. The adverse effects seem to be more pronounced in Jaffna. Here in Jaffna a political party that is a partner of the current government, was given a monopoly over the appointment of external council members over whom it kept a tight control after their appointment, by summoning them for pre-council meetings before each monthly council meeting. Jaffna is the only university in Sri Lanka that has these pre-council meetings. The Act provides only for the VC to preside over a council meeting subject to a quorum and there is no provision for a pre-council meeting to be chaired by a minister whose portfolio does

not include education. Besides, councillors parody their function when they take orders from a minister, when the law assumes the exercise of their own judgment. But the internal council members too have gone along without protest and consequently few councillors know or care about the rules. The Council's ability to dispense government patronage enabled it to obtain the concurrence of deans and academics, who also sit on selection boards for non-academic appointments and pass lists of candidates forwarded by the EPDP. A powerful core of internal members is served well by this system and the others take the easy way out by playing along. This became the thin end of the wedge, resulting in a tightly controlled selection of Vice-Chancellor (see JUSTA report).

Academics who fall in line enjoy unchallenged power in their own spheres, especially over appointments to the academic staff. Consequently the younger staff have become fatalistically resigned to an order where they have no voice. It has become normal to hear a capable young staff member saying, "I will move out once my bond agreement lapses." The University can now be described as comprising three layers. First, there is the political establishment. Second, the Vice Chancellor, the Council and academics who are in favour with the political establishment. And third are the remaining academics and students who have no voice and are fatalistically silent. **It is up to academic staff, who next to students, comprise the better part of the university, to speak out against this abuse of the system, or else become complicit in the malfeasance.**

## **I. MALFEASANCE IN ACADEMIC RECRUITMENT**

Members of the upper administration of the University of Jaffna who enjoy political favour, are so protected by the political establishment that when well-founded cases of abuse in academic recruitment are reported, no action is taken. This report aims to redress this problem by documenting several cases across faculties for which we found evidence in Council Minutes so that reparation could be made in favour of well-qualified applicants who have been cheated.

For the recruitment of probationary lecturers, academic merit certified over four years is the objective criterion that minimizes unfairness. Particular circumstances may have left a potentially brilliant student with a pass degree. Such persons are not to be shut out by the applicable circulars. Such students should be encouraged to be academically active and once they prove themselves with a recognized research degree, they could apply directly for the position of senior lecturer. As the following cases show, a) to use subjective criteria to pick weaker over strong performers for the position of probationary lecturers, b) recruiting as probationary lecturers those in their late thirties who have shown no academic achievement for many years after graduation and c) advancing hair-splitting reasons not to interview an applicant with sound academic credentials and a good PhD, are the symptoms of the ongoing abuse that enshrines mediocrity as a university norm.

Such signs of impending abuse are sometimes evident in the selection of temporary lecturers, when a weaker candidate is selected above one or more candidates higher on the merit list, or when deserving candidates are dropped. Under the older UGC Circular 721, a year's teaching experience was mandatory for selection as permanent lecturer. Circular 935 of 2010 dropped this requirement. But pushing favoured weak candidates for temporary appointments (and in one case giving fictitious teaching experience) is now a means of advantaging those favoured and throwing out deserving candidates.

# 1. SCIENCE FACULTY

## 1.1 Zoology

**Nilani Kanesharatnam** topped the batch with 1<sup>st</sup> Class Honours in Zoology Special with a GPA 3.72 and faced the interview for probationary lecturer on 14<sup>th</sup> October 2013. Hers is also a case of the systematic manipulation of the way schedules are either carelessly prepared or deliberately skewed. If the schedule (prepared by the Senior Assistant Registrar (Academic Establishments) which is the main summary presented to the Interview Board) had flagged her winning the Sir Sangarapillai Pararajasingam Award for best performance in Zoology Special, denying her the position would have been harder. This distinction, Nilani had put down in her application form. The schedule completely omitted it. The candidate given the appointment was about the weakest of the eleven interviewed, having a 2<sup>nd</sup> Upper with a GPA 3.44. The selected candidate had been a school teacher rather than an active researcher as Nilani was. During the interview, the Vice Chancellor had stopped Nilani's presentation after 2 minutes, but gave the selected candidate wide berth to present herself.

Nilani delayed her protest because she had also applied for a post in Fisheries. But Senior Assistant Registrar (SAR) Academic Establishments called neither Nilani nor the other Zoo Special graduates for the Fisheries interview, although the head of the Fisheries Department had wanted the Zoo Specials interviewed. The recruitment scheme obliges SAR (AE) to call all applicants in Category 1 – those with a first or second upper in the relevant discipline. In Jaffna, Zoology has been the only relevant discipline for Fisheries. The head of department and all other lecturers in fisheries are Zoo Specials and there were no local graduates in fisheries.

Only one of the three applicants, all from Ruhuna with degrees in Fisheries, turned up for the interview on 13<sup>th</sup> December 2013. But no selection was made, according to a member of the selection board, because the course contents in Jaffna and Ruhuna were very different – when in fact one would have expected some standardisation of the fisheries degree curricula in Jaffna and Ruhuna, both approved by the UGC. The member added that Zoo Specials from Jaffna are quite well equipped to teach the Fisheries course, which in fact evolved from Zoology. This makes the refusal to interview Zoo Specials even more indefensible. When the Vice Chancellor was questioned at the Council, she was evasive. She did not deny that Zoology was a relevant subject, but said nothing about righting the wrong. Those with good degrees entitled to be interviewed were sent away. The Council has neither responded to Nilani's appeal against unfairness nor that from the JUSTA on her behalf.

There is a strong possibility that the SAR (AE) to protect himself left a minute (as he had done in another case) that on the instructions of the Vice Chancellor and Dean of Science he was not summoning Zoology graduates for the Fisheries interview.

## 1.2 Computer Science

Four candidates with first classes faced selection interviews for probationary lecturer in computer science on 8<sup>th</sup> May 2012. Three had graduated from Jaffna University in 2010 (one with a special degree in Applied Mathematics and Computing from the Vavuniya Campus). One had graduated in India in 2011. The leading candidate, Miss. Jeevaki Gunesingam, was from

Jaffna with a GPA of 3.80. The student who topped the batch with a GPA of 3.84 had left for study in the USA. However, the selection board ruled, “*No selection is made since the presentation skill, subject knowledge and overall performance of the candidates are not satisfactory*”. The candidates were virtually shooed off by the selectors with a strong hint that to apply again would be futile. How could the Selection Board belittle in a 15 minute interview the subject knowledge of a person rated as outstanding through an evaluation process spread out over four years? No one knows the answer. In the case of Jeevaki, her first class certification was by the University of Jaffna itself, which has been now deemed ‘not satisfactory’.

Further selection interviews were held on 12<sup>th</sup> November 2013. Aravinthan Gopalasingham, a 1<sup>st</sup> Class Bachelor of Electronics and Communication Engineering from Anna University, a Master's in Engineering with First Class in AIT Bangkok with industrial research experience in India, France and Japan, was listed, but did not come for the interview. Such strong candidates are unlikely to make the long trip at their own time and expense unless they are engaged and made to feel wanted. Only two candidates appeared for the interview. One was a 2<sup>nd</sup> Upper from Jeevaki's batch who had not applied in 2012. The selected candidate ‘S’ had graduated with a 2<sup>nd</sup> Upper in June 2001. From March 2003 he had been attached to the Computer Unit, a service unit at the University, as Assistant Network Manager Grade II. He took study leave and obtained an M.Sc in Advanced Computing from the University of Colombo in 2012, which was presented to the Council in November 2012 for his promotion to Assistant Network Manager Grade I.

Jeevaki, the 1<sup>st</sup> Class candidate, went into school teaching in July 2012 after the University rejected her in May 2012. She had not applied for the academic position for which interviews were held in November 2013. She applied for two non-academic positions at the University in 2014, and was rejected for Instructor in Computer Technology on 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2014 and did not subsequently appear for the interview for the position of Programmer/ Systems Analyst.

The right thing to have done by the selected candidate ‘S’ was to have asked him to first do a good research degree and then apply for Senior Lecturer Grade II. There was no excuse for taking someone with meagre evidence of academic progress for over 10 years beyond following a two-year MSc, in the presence of first classes. The academic relevance of S's long experience in the Computer Unit is indicated in the fact that on 29<sup>th</sup> May 2014, his successor, who had a bare pass in the BSc General Degree was selected over a 2<sup>nd</sup> Upper in Computer Science Special (2010) who had gone into school teaching. The fact that several young first classes were given the short shrift the previous year makes it even more questionable. The position of probationary lecturer is designed as an investment in a young graduate who shows promise. S had not applied for probationary lecturer when Jeevaki was interviewed in 2012, although he was around, working on his promotion to Assistant Network Manager Grade I. **Circumstances make it look as though S was smuggled in as Lecturer at the very moment the most eligible young first classes, including Jeevaki, had been shooed off and credible applicants had dried up.** Her failure to challenge the University legally over the ignominy inflicted on her, made it easy for the University to throw her on the dust heap and completely ignore her as it did Nilani. When the head of department and senior officials of the University denigrate their own first class students with ‘subject knowledge unsatisfactory’, it is clear that this appointment is to do with patronage and favouritism, and not done with a view to enhance the academic outlook of the department.

## 2. FACULTY OF ENGINEERING: TWO CIVIL ENGINEERS AND AN UNTIMELY PRECEDENT

The coming of the Faculty of Engineering to the University was an opportune moment for a breath of fresh air to advance integrity and excellence thus far lacking in university selection procedures. However, entrenched practices appear to have taken their toll. The first civil engineer was initially appointed Coordinator for commencing the Engineering Faculty about the end of 2011 after the earlier coordinator left. We will refer to this Civil Engineer as Coordinator. The second is Dr. Sahayam. Both Sahayam and Coordinator are of about the same age and were admitted to the faculties in Moratuwa and Peradeniya in respectively 1981 and 1982. As with many Tamil students affected by the July 1983 communal violence, Sahayam, after commencing studies at Moratuwa, left in good standing and completed his degree in India, at the University of Madras. Both did well in their first degrees and careers. Coordinator went into the irrigation field and advanced in his profession to management levels. Sahayam taught, mainly at technician level, obtained a Commonwealth Scholarship and received his PhD in 1995 from Queen's University, Canada, in Coastal Engineering, for which that university is renowned, and then was a research associate in Moratuwa University for two years and has management experience at SLIATE. Coordinator got his PhD from the University of Moratuwa in 2008 on ground water.

Coordinator was absorbed by the University as Senior Lecturer Grade I in Civil Engineering in November 2012, although he was apparently disqualified by UGC Circular 721. The Circular required him to have six years of experience after his 2008 doctorate. The oversight on this basic requirement suggests that the shortcoming was deliberately ignored.

Sahayam subsequently answered the University advertisement (closing date 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2013) for the posts of Senior Lecturer Grade I, Gr. II and Lecturer Probationary in Civil, Electrical, Electronics and Computer Engineering. Sahayam was the only candidate interviewed for Senior Lecturer Gr.I in Civil on 26<sup>th</sup> April 2013. The selection board was identical to that which made the flawed selection of Coordinator five months earlier (19<sup>th</sup> Nov.2012). On the selection board the Dean of Engineering was represented by Prof. Kandasamy, Dean of Science, and Head Civil Engineering was represented by Prof. Srisatkunarahah, Head, Mathematics and Statistics. The Senate nominee was S.B. Weerakoon, Professor of Civil Engineering from Peradeniya and was not from the Senate as required. It is not clear that "prior written permission" had been obtained from the UGC for these numerous departures from the mandatory provisions of UGC Circular 166. All board members signed 'no selection was made.' This was a dodgy decision on the part of a board that was tasked to decide whether the candidate satisfies the terms of recruitment or not.

Dr. Sahayam applied the following year and was interviewed again for Senior Lecturer Grade I in Civil Engineering on 5<sup>th</sup> May 2014. The selection board was forthright this time and turned Sahayam down on the grounds that his '*subject knowledge, teaching skill, research ability and overall performance are not satisfactory.*' This kind of comment presumes that the Vice Chancellor and others on selection boards have all-round expertise in subjects that are far removed from their own. The comment is more blatantly biased coming from Coordinator who was by then Acting Head of Civil Engineering and Acting Dean, Engineering, who were both on the selection board along with Prof. Weerakoon. In fact Sahayam met all the requirements on

subject knowledge, research and teaching skill; besides he has a great deal of teaching experience. His command of English and articulation are not inferior to that of anyone on the selection board. How was he assessed? Just at the interview? What are the facts?

While both Coordinator and Sahayam have similar engineering degrees and working experience, the crucial difference in their qualifications is research. Sahayam has three refereed publications (two foreign and one local) flowing mainly from his PhD research (*'Optimum Geometry for Naturally Armoring Breakwaters'* in the Journal of Coastal Research, USA, 1998, and *'Stability of round heads of naturally armouring breakwaters'*, in *'Breakwaters, Coastal Structures and Coastlines'*, Institution of Civil Engineers, London, 2001). Coordinator has little to match this. Apart from conference proceedings, there are no refereed publications, even from his PhD research. This is a comment on the standing of the PhDs of the two engineers. If the Coordinator is qualified for Senior Lecturer Grade I, how could Sahayam be rejected on grounds of unsatisfactory research ability and subject knowledge? How could the engineers on the selection board disregard his research ability certified by a leading university that gave him a PhD, leading to publications in respected fora?

According to UGC Circular 721, Senior Lecturer Grade I requires that the candidates score a minimum of 15 points for research in an assessment by a committee appointed by the Senate. A fair assessment, rather than a count of the number of papers, must give weightage to quality research. No assessment was appended in the documents sent to the Council in either instance, and one infers that Senate assessments were not done. Had they been done, it would be hard to explain how Coordinator passed and Sahayam failed. If there wasn't an assessment both selection processes were improper. Except when it chooses, the University of Jaffna has not been strict on the research requirement. For example, on 18<sup>th</sup> March 2013, a candidate with a BA General (Pass) was promoted to Senior Lecturer Grade I in English Language Teaching (ELT) on the strength of an M.Phil in Linguistics (Jaffna). No refereed publications were shown.

Once such ethical transgressions are admitted, the new Engineering Faculty is doomed to go the way of the rest of the University. Every candidate who applies to the University is entitled to fair treatment and this should be reflected in the selection minutes that go to the Council. The fairness is further brought into question when in his successful application for Senior Lecturer Grade I in Civil Engineering, the Coordinator had given as his first academic referee, his son's father-in-law, Professor of Agronomy and former Rector of the Vavuniya Campus, a conflict of interest. Sahayam had applied to the University in 2002 when it first advertised for Engineers, changed its mind when a Senior Professor of Electrical Engineering from Peradeniya applied and then advertised for a Civil Engineer (to put up the buildings according to the vice chancellor then). Neither applicant received a response.

### **3. ARTS FACULTY: THROWING AWAY MERIT**

#### **3.1 Sociology**

**Siddharthan Maunaguru** with a first in Sociology from the University of Peradeniya and a PhD in Anthropology (a related subject) from the Johns Hopkins University in the US applied for a position in Sociology at the University of Jaffna. Although he was shortlisted for the interview, the SAR Academic made a note that Maunaguru could be dropped because the position required



a PhD in Sociology, while the applicant's was in Anthropology. This was disingenuous as Sociology and Anthropology share many theoretical and practical orientations. Maunaguru was not called for the interview. The regulations are clear that anyone with qualifications appropriate to the position in a relevant discipline must be called and it is the selection board alone that must decide. The SAR (AE) should play no evaluating role, but we also see abuse of this position in Nilani's case (in Fisheries above).

**Paramsothy Thanges** was listed on the schedule to be interviewed for Probationary Lecturer in Sociology on 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2012. Thanges had a BA Special with 1st Class (2006) from Peradeniya and an MA with a Merit Pass from the University of East London. After graduation he had worked two years in the Department of Sociology, University of Colombo, as temporary lecturer and had published several research articles and edited books in both the English and Tamil languages. Thanges could not attend the interview in 2012, because he was to follow a PhD at East London University and had sent his passport to the British Home Office for a visa extension. He wrote to the Vice Chancellor, Dean/Arts, and Head/Sociology, asking for another date but heard no more.

Thanges had earlier faced his first interview for Probationary Lecturer in Sociology at the University about mid-2010. In his own words:

“When I faced the interview, I took all my publications with me. The interview board particularly, the Vice Chancellor who was from the Department of Sociology, and another person (I think he is not working in the university) started to question me on my published work. All my publications focussed particularly on caste dynamics, exclusion and discrimination during the time of war and displacement in Jaffna. They challenged and questioned my work at length. As my papers were based on research findings, I was very happy to answer their questions with examples. I was then a qualitative researcher in the Applied Research Unit of UNOPS in Colombo. As part of my job, I did a month's research in selected Jaffna villages, where too I found social distances practised by different caste groups particularly in the religious domain. This, I explained with fresh examples on caste-based social exclusion and spatial practices in Jaffna's villages.”

Several members of the selection board objected to Thanges' findings on caste and exclusion and he sensed that he would not be selected. The selection board did not appoint anyone, fearing perhaps that the appointment of a less qualified person would result in a legal challenge. Whatever views the selection board had on Thanges' work, it is differences and controversy that challenge and enrich scholarship. Here again, the University's pattern of turning away first class degree holders is clear.

### 3.2 English Language Teaching

**Mahendran Thiruvarangan** with a first class in English Literature in 2009 from Peradeniya (the former University of Ceylon), taught in Jaffna as a Temporary Lecturer in English Literature for 1 ½ years until he left for his doctoral studies in the US in August 2011. The cadre for

A case from the University of Peradeniya shows precedents where universities have been more forthcoming in identifying young academic talent and securing their services. A candidate with a PhD from a university in the West was interviewed online for Lecturer (Probationary) in Fine Arts in December 2012. She had not yet completed her dissertation and PhD when she was interviewed for this position, but

English Literature being frozen at two, there was no position in English Literature for him to apply to. Being keen to live and work in Jaffna, he applied for a permanent position in the ELTC in October 2010 while he was Temporary Lecturer in English Literature. The interview was held a year later on the 19<sup>th</sup> October 2011 two months after Thiruvarangan left for the US to begin his Ph.D. programme. He sent an appeal to the Vice Chancellor (through the Head/ ELTC & Dean/Arts) stating that he could not attend as classes for his Ph.D that semester had already started, but that he was available for an online interview. The appeal was declined. So keen was he to serve in Jaffna that he has kept applying for ELTC positions.

The ELTC position was advertised again in December 2011 and Thiruvarangan applied. The interview was scheduled for the 17<sup>th</sup> of April 2012. He could not appear because classes for his Ph.D had started that semester, and he appealed requesting the university to postpone the interview to any date after 20<sup>th</sup> of May 2012 and before 16<sup>th</sup> August 2012. The appeal which he emailed to the Vice Chancellor, the Dean/Faculty of Arts and the Head/ELTC was declined. There are no rules governing such decisions – it is easy to make reasonable allowances for talented and motivated candidates.

**A Curious Sequel:** Interviews for Category 1 applicants for Probationary Lecturer for the ELTC and Law were fixed for 17<sup>th</sup> April 2012, by two selection boards having five out of their six members in common. Only one candidate had applied for each. Thiruvarangan had already said that he would be available. The candidate for Law, a 2<sup>nd</sup> Upper from Colombo was absent. The University prepared to interview the Category 2 (2<sup>nd</sup> Lower) candidates, of whom there were two each for Law and the ELTC. The interview for ELTC, and probably for Law as well, was fixed on 15<sup>th</sup> May (see box below).

**Law Interview: A justifiable postponement:** A 2<sup>nd</sup> Lower from the U of Colombo went for the Law interview about 15<sup>th</sup> May 2012. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Lower from the U of Jaffna who had applied was absent. The candidate from Colombo remembers that he was called in and told by an official that the interview would not take place that day but would be held in a week or two. What had happened was that the candidate from Jaffna who like Thiruvarangan had served as a temporary lecturer (in Law) from February 2011 had in August joined the two-year LLM course at the South Asian University in Delhi. Her first year vacation commenced usually about the last week of May. This was why the interview was improperly postponed without informing the other candidate and was held on 24<sup>th</sup> May. The choice was obvious. There is nothing set about the date for an interview and finding a date suitable for all is good practice. But why was this courtesy extended abruptly to a Category 2 candidate in Law, denied to a Category 1 (1<sup>st</sup> Class) candidate in English, who had already arrived in Jaffna by 24<sup>th</sup> May as he had previously informed university administration? The latter, it would appear, was **deliberately** excluded. Moreover, the selected candidate in Law, after commencing work in early June, was in August allowed to go back to India, finish her LLM and rejoin the department. UGC Circular 429 gives councils of universities wide discretion in the timing of study leave to probationary staff. But the implementation does not appear to be uniformly fair.

**ELTC Interview: Questions about the exclusion of two 1<sup>st</sup> Classes:** One candidate with a 2<sup>nd</sup> Lower who graduated in 2009 was selected for a permanent ELT position on 15<sup>th</sup> May 2012. The closing date for the position had been 13<sup>th</sup> January 2012, which excluded the five young women finalists in English Literature whose results were due in about three months. Thiruvarangan's application was excluded by a refusal to change the interview date. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Lower had also been interviewed for the temporary ELT position on 13<sup>th</sup> March and selected along with three others awaiting their results in English Literature that were due soon. In these circumstances, the alacrity with which a 2<sup>nd</sup> Lower was permanently inducted into the ELTC is questionable.

### **ELTC: 1<sup>st</sup> Class Degrees Excluded Again**

Another interview for the ELTC positions was advertised on 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2013. Thiruvarangan applied again. Among the applicants were four young women who had obtained special degrees in English Literature from Jaffna. Among them was Miss. L. Paramanathan who obtained a 1<sup>st</sup> Class and three others who obtained 2<sup>nd</sup> Uppers. Teachers who taught them said that Miss. Paramanathan was definitely outstanding. The four above (and another) who had sat for their finals in English Literature were before their results interviewed on 13<sup>th</sup> March 2012 for Temporary Lecturerships in English Literature and ELT. Only Miss. Paramanathan was chosen for Literature. All four also faced the ELT interview held the same day, but Miss. Paramanathan was dropped, while the other three were selected. This was already a signal that Miss. Paramanathan would be excluded when interviews were held for permanent positions in ELT, the only area in which she could secure permanency. Their teacher, a PhD in English Literature from Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), has not been called to be present at any interview faced by her students. They were represented by the Head of Linguistics and English who could hardly speak for them.

The ELTC interview was held on 10<sup>th</sup> October 2013. Thiruvarangan, who had by then obtained his MA from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst and was now following the PhD programme at City University, New York, was refused an on-line interview, but was again, obviously the outstanding candidate (even though the schedule omitted reference to the three prizes he listed in his application: the Ashley Halpé Scholarship for the student with the highest marks in English in the first year exam, the EFC Ludowyke Prize for English, and the Leigh Smith Prize for Greatest Competency in English). Miss. Paramanathan with a first in English Literature who had been the most capable candidate in the experience of her teachers, was dropped for Lecturer Probationary in ELT, while her three colleagues having 2<sup>nd</sup> Uppers were selected.

There had been no one competent in English Language teaching on the selection board. The Acting Head of ELTC who was from another department had wanted the interview postponed. Others, including Dean of Arts, agreed, but did not protest when the Vice Chancellor entered and started the interviews. Again, the teacher of the selected candidates, who is well qualified in English Literature with a PhD, has never been called to the selection board for any interview, either in ELTC or for temporary lecturers in English Literature. Those called have usually been from Linguistics or the ELTC (which is not a department). The fault lies in the Circular governing selection boards and in the University not asking the UGC for a waiver citing special circumstances.

## **The Fate of English Language and English Literature at Jaffna University**

English literary studies are inter-disciplinary globally, and now include writers from South Asia including Sri Lanka, Africa and other formerly colonised countries. World trends and mobility have steadily increased the need for competence in English and Jaffna's isolation for nearly three decades makes it imperative to take advantage of every possible resource. In the University itself, all faculties, except the Arts Faculty, deliver lectures and conduct examinations in English. Yet many lecturers struggle with their English. The University's English Language Teaching Centre (ELTC) which conducts courses on English usage appears to have been fighting an uphill battle.

It is in this context that we must examine the fate of English Literature at the University. English Literature supports language learning, makes it meaningful, and introduces the student to the nuances fundamental to good English usage. The ELTC can never take that place. In the old University of Ceylon, the ripple effect of great teachers in the English and Humanities inspired many through their wider interests. By contrast, English Literature at the University of Jaffna has been starved of staff and resources.

In Jaffna, English Literature, housed in the Department of Linguistics and English, has been overshadowed by Linguistics which has a significantly larger cadre. Having originally a cadre of three, one English literature position was transferred to the ELTC in the 1990s to move Suresh Canagarajah who returned from the US with a PhD in Applied Linguistics to the ELTC, owing to differences between him and the Head of Linguistics.

Meanwhile, the remaining two permanent staff in English Literature, amidst considerable struggle, produce special degree holders in English Literature using temporary staff, while many of their graduates have joined the ELTC. The university must rectify this situation and allocate more positions to English Literature, which should be its own department. At least once, a separate Department of English Literature was approved by the Senate, but failed to materialise. Post graduate degree students are reluctant to pursue English literature which is starved of staff and tend to do Masters' degrees under a Linguistics don or on ELTC topics.

No one from English Literature has been made head of Linguistics and English, though staff from Linguistics occupied the Head's position all the time. This means that English Literature had no voice in the Senate, while the ELTC has had one or two senate representatives. English Literature academics have not had a place on selection boards, not even when interviewing temporary lecturers for Literature.

Early in the 2000s, the UGC enabled instructors in the ELTC to become lecturers, leading to laxity in academic standards. The ELTC in time gained more cadre positions as student numbers in the University increased, while cadre for Literature remained frozen at two, though academically sound. The result was a conflict of interest as to who represented English, where politics rather than merit played the larger part. With larger numbers, the ELTC gained political weight. Whether the events were planned or incidental, their effect was the rising influence of the ELTC at the cost of English Literature. Excluded from the Senate, headships and selection boards, English Literature faculty cannot ensure fair treatment of their students by the University. **The vested interests of the ELTC can be seen in the systematic and spurious exclusion of first classes in English Literature who can give the ELTC academic substance.**

## **4. FACULTY OF MANAGEMENT**

### **4.1 Setting New Norms for the University**

Many of the malpractices the University has seen and improvised over the past seem to be systematically practiced in the Faculty of Management where its influence has also led to its interference in other university units, based on the Dean's role in securing the VC's second term. These include disqualifying candidates with specialization in the relevant subject, doctoring schedules given to the selection board to diminish the qualifications of strong candidates and give an artificial boost to those favoured. The University held six interviews for positions of probationary assistant lecturers in Management. We begin with the most recent.

### **4.2 Human Resource Management**

On 19<sup>th</sup> March 2014 interviews were held for a Probationary Lecturer in Human Resource Management. However, schedules were incorrectly prepared, perhaps deliberately manipulated. The leading candidates were Mr. L.M., having BBA 1<sup>st</sup> Class with GPA 3.54 in 2011 and Miss. Thusyanthini Nadarasa, 1<sup>st</sup> Class with GPA 3.54 in 2012. The selected candidate L.M. was flagged in the Awards section of the schedule with the obscure and ill-defined 'Best Article Award, Management Studies, University of Jaffna'. Correspondingly, the fact that Miss. Nadarasa was given the award for best performance in Human Resources Management was not flagged. The downgrading of Miss. Nadarasa had begun when she was overlooked for the position of temporary lecturer in late 2012 although she had topped HRM. The Awards section in her schedule was left blank. Her annexure too did not mention it, but showed that she was academically active.

In the Faculty of Management, all top performers from the 2012 batch in the sub-disciplines of Financial Management, Human Resources Management, Commerce (Miss. Kosalathevi Tharmalingam and A. Ajanthan both 1<sup>st</sup> Classes with GPA 3.55) and Accounting were denied permanent positions under questionable or outright-defective selections.

### **4.2 Financial Management**

**Ravivathani Thuraisingam (26)**, Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA), came first in the 2012 batch in the Faculty of Management, and was quite definitely the top student with a GPA 3.63. She won the Securities and Exchange Commission Gold Medal and was an all rounder with achievements in sports, and was admitted for the MBA by Colombo University. Ravivathani applied for two positions for which she was eligible, but was improperly not shortlisted for the B.Com interview and rejected for a position in Financial Management. Her GPA placed her as the leading candidate for both from the 2012 batch and on the basis of her performance had been appointed temporary assistant lecturer and served for over a year.

On 17<sup>th</sup> March 2014, interviews were held for the position of Probationary Lecturer in Financial Management. At this interview Ravivathani with GPA 3.63 was rejected in favour of candidate Miss. T with GPA 3.49 from the same batch. Here the schedule given to the selection board did

not flag Ravivathani's achievements and gold medal as making her the outstanding candidate. There were besides two glaring anomalies.

**First, there was false information on the schedule** that gave Miss. T. far greater teaching experience than what she actually had. According to the schedule, the selected candidate was soon after passing out made Temporary Lecturer in Financial Management from 20 Apr.2012. The interview for the post of temporary lecturer was not held until 6<sup>th</sup> Nov.2012 and only Ravivathani was selected. Miss. T who also faced the interview was not even among the two reserves. Neither did Miss. T's name appear with Ravivathani's in the Jan.2013 council minutes among temporary lecturers given extension of service. It was in the interview of 8<sup>th</sup> May 2013 that while Ravivathani was selected first on the list among the two, Miss. T was selected second over Miss. J with a GPA of 3.61, who was first reserve at the earlier selection. We learn, first, that Miss. T was previously employed as a management trainee in the university administration. **Second,** Ravivathani has stated in her complaint to the Council that **the Chairman of the Board (Vice Chancellor) left about a minute after her interview had commenced** and her interview was largely conducted in the VC's absence. In Ravivathani's case the VC has signed the selection of Miss. T (and rejection of Ravivathani) as chairman of the board, which points to pre-selection. Rathivathani has filed a Fundamental Rights appeal in the Supreme Court of Sri Lanka on this issue.

### 4.3 Commerce

On 19<sup>th</sup> February 2014 interviews for three positions of Probationary Lecturer in Commerce (Jaffna Campus) were held. The applications of those with BBA's (including Ravivathani's) were turned down contrary to the rules. Although BBA is a degree with a subject of specialisation (e.g. Financial Management), it is a 'relevant discipline' for B. Com. making it mandatory for BBA applicants to be interviewed. BBAs do almost the same subjects as B.Com. Those selected were:

1. R. Kajanathan, B.Com with a 2<sup>nd</sup> Upper, GPA 3.19 from the 2012 batch, selected over five first classes, three of them from the same batch, two, including A. Ajanthan, with GPA 3.55 and another from the previous batch with GPA 3.57. **We understand that the selected candidate taught A. Level Commerce at Ideal Tutor in Neervely, along with the Dean Management from 2007 to 2012.**
2. Mrs. Sabina Dineshkumar, B.Com with 1<sup>st</sup> Class in 2008 with two stints in 2009 and a long stint from Nov.2011 as temporary lecturer. GPA not given in the schedule.
3. N. Umakanth (39), graduated in 2000 with a 2<sup>nd</sup> Upper. Has given no evidence of being academically active during the past 14 years except an MA in Planning from Jaffna in 2009.

The selection of the last candidate, when compared with those who had been rejected, clearly shows favouritism or political direction in the availability of good first classes, and the Faculty's indifference to maintaining standards. At the selection of two temporary lecturers on 6<sup>th</sup> November 2012, A. Ajanthan, 1<sup>st</sup> Class GPA 3.55 topped the selection. Kajanathan 2<sup>nd</sup> Upper with GPA 3.19 was smuggled in second over Miss. Sivapalan, a 1<sup>st</sup> Class with GPA 3.38. At the selection for permanency, it was Ajanthan's turn to be thrown out. The first and third selected

candidates are clear cases of malfeasance. This raises questions about the second who appeared for an interview in Marketing in 2009 and was not selected and was apparently brought back as temporary assistant lecturer after two years at the end of 2011 and kept until she was selected. She had not applied for the position in Marketing at Vavuniya Campus for which candidates were interviewed at the end of December 2013. There is no dearth of graduates passing out with good classes and positions of temporary lecturer for a year are usually given to fresh graduates as a respite to work out their future.

#### **4.4 Business Management**

The Bachelor of Business Management (BBM) is an external online course. The appointment is on contract, but the faculty hopes to recruit cadre for the Business Management Department. On **31<sup>st</sup> December 2013**, interviews were held for a Tutor-Mentor on contract for BBM Online, External (with prospect of permanency if cadre positions are approved). Of those interviewed, candidates 2, 3, and 4 (as listed in the Schedule) having 1<sup>st</sup> Classes with GPA 3.36 to 3.46 were rejected, but candidate 5 with a 2<sup>nd</sup> Upper was chosen. All were from the 2012 batch.

In all six positions filled recently in the Management Faculty, First Class degree holders applying from the 2012 batch were systematically excluded in favor of less accomplished,

### **“Management Training” at the Library?**

In 2013 about seven top performing women who had graduated from the Faculty of Management with BBAs were interviewed at the Registrar’s office for positions of Management Trainees and four of them, including Miss. V, who topped the batch in Financial Management, were posted to the Library from about 25<sup>th</sup> September. In the Library they found that their work was to sit in front of the counter and record materials moving in and moving out, duplicating part of the work done at the counter. The young women complained to the Registrar that this did not even remotely resemble management training. According to them, the Registrar told them to comply because the Vice Chancellor wanted it done. At the end of it they would get a certificate for having undergone management training.

An insinuation was in effect made that the young women's posting was a security measure due to fraud allegations against the Library. Apparently there was a police investigation into a fraud in the Finance Branch in the purchase of books, which was in fact discovered by the Library. However, on 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2014, a council member who is an Accountant, and was nominated by the Council to inquire into the Library matter, reported that apart from the technical lapse, there was no issue. Yet about Rs. 6 lakhs of university money was misused in paying trainees, merely to make an insinuation against the Library. (The Indian bookseller DSBI who is owed about USD 10,000 has been kept waiting from January 2013 to create an impression of fraud by the Library, and as of July 2014 still has not been paid, in spite of repeated polite reminders).

On 28<sup>th</sup> May, Miss. V, who topped the batch with a GPA of 3.66 was interviewed and selected for the post of Temporary Lecturer in Financial Management. The schedule stated that she was appointed Trainee Management Assistant at the Library from 26<sup>th</sup> Sept.2013 to 28<sup>th</sup> May.2014. Had she formally protested about the so-called training she would have lost any chance of securing a permanent academic position.

usually Second Class degree holders. Such manipulation of probationary lecturers’ appointments in the Management Faculty exists not only at the level of selection, but also extends to its trainee appointments in places like the Library. The degrading use of top performing graduates is one of the ways they are moulded into a corrupt system.

## **5. LIBRARY SCIENCE**

**Intimidation and Favoritism in Library Appointments:** Whether a librarian being appointed for a particular discipline should be a subject specialist has been a question leading to selective decisions. An older school of thought holds that subject specialization is immaterial in librarianship. Following the opening of the Engineering and Agriculture Faculties in Killinochchi in January 2014, Engineering had two cadre positions awarded for assistant librarians and



Agriculture had none. The University advertised three assistant librarians' positions, the third for Social Science.

Since the position was an academic one, thirty of those who applied had 2<sup>nd</sup> Uppers or 1<sup>st</sup> Classes and were called for the interview. The qualified applicants were 18 from agriculture, 2 from engineering, 1 from science and 9 from humanities and management. The selection scheme gave only partial weight to academic merit. Of the four first classes who applied (all agriculture), only one was selected as second reserve. Those selected on the engineering cadre were Miss. Abhirame Sivasanthiran (the only engineering graduate who appeared for the interview) and Mrs. Bamithra Nithyanarmathan (agriculture 2<sup>nd</sup> Upper). Those in the reserve were in the order of points scored Mrs. Thiviya Janen (agriculture 2<sup>nd</sup> Upper) and Miss. Ambikai Sivagnam (agriculture 1<sup>st</sup> Class).

The Council approved the selection on 28<sup>th</sup> December 2013 and decided the three selected, including the two for engineering and agriculture, would commence work on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2014. Owing to a delay in issuing letters of appointment, Mrs. Nithyanarmathan reported to the Librarian on 6<sup>th</sup> January and was posted to the Medical Library to understudy. Mrs. Sivasanthiran delayed; reportedly because she disputed the salary scale she was assigned. What followed is very shameful and hard to explain fully.

We have confirmed that on 7<sup>th</sup> January, SAR (AE), phoned the Medical Library and summoned Mrs. Nithyanarmathan. She later told the Librarian that the SAR scared her out of her wits by blackguarding her on her failure to state her current employment on her application form, though at the interview she did say that she was employed. She was an agricultural research officer at the Thinnevely Farm and technically she should have sent her application to the University through her department. From what she said it appears that once she was selected by the University, her head at the department had advised her not to put in her resignation immediately as there may be a long delay in the University calling her.

**The advice we received on the matter is that Mrs. Nithyanarmathan had not committed a serious offence. She had not made a false declaration. By contrast the claim contained in the schedule of the candidate selected for Financial Management, that she had been a temporary lecturer from April 2012 (see above) was a false declaration either by her or by the authorities. And those who selected her and SAR (AE) would have known it.**

On Mrs. N's account to the Librarian, once SAR (AE) had got her thoroughly frightened over being dragged to court on criminal charges and losing her job, the SAR (AE) took her before the Vice Chancellor, and both advised her to go away quickly and get back to her old job. The Librarian advised her to stay and fight it out, but she was so frightened that she went away the same day and cut off all contact.

The Vice Chancellor and SAR Academic abused their authority and acted far in excess of what is permissible. It is the Council who employed Mrs. Nithyanarmathan, and neither the VC nor the SAR had any right to summon and importune her. If there was an anomaly in her application, they should have put it to the Council and let the Council decide whether to take action on the matter.

The Vice Chancellor reported to the Council on 8<sup>th</sup> February 2014, “Mrs. Bamithra Nithyanarmathan has assumed duties without submitting a release letter and she had not mentioned about her employment in her application form”...After ‘discussion’ the Council decided to cancel the appointment of Mrs. Nithyanarmathan and appoint the first reserve Mrs. Thiviya Janen. The latter was an agriculture graduate, daughter-in-law of the Coordinator for Engineering at the time the post was advertised, daughter of a former Rector of the Vavuniya Campus, and an M.Phil student of the Vice Chancellor in Bio-Chemistry. If the Vice-Chancellor actually had direct authority over this matter, actions taken to ensure the appointment of one of her students would have been a conflict of interest; since the VC did not have direct authority, her advice to Nithyanarmathan amounted to intimidation. (The Council also decided to appoint the second reserve Miss. Sivagnanam in place of Miss. Sivasanthiran who had not assumed duties).

## **6. SPORTS SCIENCE: THE CASE OF THE PREFERRED CANDIDATE (PC)**

**Surenthini Sithamparanathan (SS)** with a 1<sup>st</sup> Class Master’s in Physical Education from Annamalai, along with the preferred candidate (PC) who held a 2<sup>nd</sup> Class Master’s, and had for four years been a sports master in a school, faced the interview for lecturer in sports science on 30<sup>th</sup> March 2012. The selection board that did not have a single member competent in Sports Science deemed all applicants uniformly unsuitable for the reason their ‘presentation skills, subject knowledge and performance at the interview [were] unsatisfactory’. No selection was made. But about two weeks later the Vice Chancellor took the unusual step of giving PC a temporary lecturership for a whole year at a time when the academic year was about to end. Temporary appointments are usually done from semester to semester.

A subsequent interview for the position was held the following year on 24<sup>th</sup> April 2013. Both PC and SS had applied. The SAR (AE) who had not informed SS of the interview summoned her at 12.00 Noon after the interviews had commenced, placing her at a severe disadvantage in view of being forced to make an impromptu presentation. PC was selected. The Vice-Chancellor cancelled PC’s appointment after SS pointed out irregularities sketched here, which were blatantly problematic, in a letter to administration. The candidates were re-interviewed on 10<sup>th</sup> October 2013. **Both SS and PC, together with the rest, were rejected by the selection committee on the grounds that ‘the subject knowledge, presentation skill and the overall performance of the candidates at the interview are unsatisfactory’.** This is rather strange, given that PC was made temporary lecturer by the Vice Chancellor for a whole year rather than for the rest of the semester and was then selected for a lecturer position by a selection committee where the Vice Chancellor and Dean Science were prominent. How a candidate placed on the staff for over a year and selected as suitable for the job could a short time later be found eminently unsuitable by a selection committee led by the same persons is a mystery. Since SS’s qualifications and ability as a practitioner of Sports Science could hardly be faulted, it seems she was retaliated against for her temerity in challenging the earlier selection of PC. Significantly, “Sports Science” itself after being tentatively assigned and refused an institutional home in the Medical, Arts and Science Faculties, is now apparently set to move to the Agriculture Faculty. This also gives a picture of how new disciplines are introduced on a poor footing, and are then used by those in authority to give jobs to favourites.

## II. NON-ACADEMIC APPOINTMENTS – POLITICAL PATRONAGE AND MALPRACTICE

Previously, appointments to non-academic staff in the universities were made by open advertisement. In March 2006, the UGC issued Circular 876 by which the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) would send a **‘list of candidates with appropriate qualifications’ from which list each university would select ‘suitable candidates’ by a written examination carrying 75 marks and an interview carrying 25 marks.** In Jaffna, the MoHE list is derived largely from a list sent by the EPDP. The Circular which privileges political cronies is contrary to the written law, and came with the change of government followed by a change of guard at the UGC. Indifference to the law at the very seat of oversight over publicly funded University Education presaged creeping loss of standards and credibility. The enactment of the Circular left in its wake contradictions and anomalies as will be seen, inevitably creating disturbing precedents for abuse in academic appointments.

UGC Circular 804 of 2002 had set minimum requirements for Computer Applications Assistants (CAA) Grade III, which included qualifications and experience in computer applications for about three years. In its list of selections in March 2009 drawn from mainly the EPDP list, the University prefaced it with the scheme of recruitment, where it claimed candidates were sought by open advertisement. However, it added without citing any authority, “If suitable applicants are not available... candidates with lesser qualifications can be considered as Trainee CAAs” and promoted after a year. Of the 21 persons selected, two obtained only 20% in the written exam, and only two others obtained 40% or more. The pass mark for the exam was set at a low 30%, and most qualified for the position by getting the difference from the 25% given for the interview. (The minimum presently accepted is a low 40% from both exam and interview, in order to continue this system of patronage.)

Besides the Registrar, the two academics on the selection committee in 2009 were the **Dean of Graduate Studies and a senior lecturer in Computer Science and head of department.** Had they declared the candidates to be unsuitable, the MoHE would have been obliged to send a more credible list. But they gave their consent to the selection, creating a dangerous precedent of lowering the bar for qualification; a pattern we also see has crept into academic appointments.

**Fixing non-academic staff selections before closing date for applications:** From the minutes of the Special Council Meeting of 11<sup>th</sup> July 2013, it transpires that the Ministry had sent a list of candidates from which selection was to be made. These candidates were told to give their certificates and complete their applications by 19<sup>th</sup> July 2013. From what the Vice Chancellor reported, it seemed that on 8<sup>th</sup> July, the Ministry telephoned the University to withdraw 30 names from the list already given and include 23 names from a fresh list, for whom, the Vice Chancellor said, it was decided to hold interviews immediately. No explanation was given for the change of names on the list.

The schedule was prepared in record time and certified by the Senior Assistant Registrar (AE) on 10<sup>th</sup> July. On the same day, 78 candidates from a list of 88 (as recorded in Council minutes – approval of appointments signed by the Vice Chancellor on 26/9/2013) were brought to the University from a political office. 69 were selected and 7 placed on the reserve list; two were disqualified as underaged.

As a further indication of the privileged nature of these applicants, the selection board interviewed five absentees the following morning and disqualified one as under aged. One absentee lady Mrs. Vasanthakumar, sent a letter of request and she was considered in absentia. So was the case with four other absentees placed on the reserve list to be placed in positions when vacancies arise. A special meeting of the Council was held the same day, 11<sup>th</sup>, after the morning's impromptu interview of the previous day's absentees, to approve the selection. **Apart from the Registrar, the academics who as members of the selection panel were party to this abuse were a Professor of Agricultural Biology and a Professor of Tamil, who did not protest.** No apologies were made to those called and dropped even before the closing date.

The lesson we learn from this incident is that when needed, the University can convene a selection board instantly, then select and secure passage through the Council in forty-eight hours. Yet academic appointments can drag on for several months before applicants are interviewed. Applicants who miss an interview may have to wait a year or much longer to reapply. Well-qualified applicants who want the interview date adjusted, particularly when they have other commitments and have to travel from abroad to make the interview, are summarily dismissed. It seems that however distinguished the candidate for an academic appointment, only political fiat can pull off 'selection in absentia'.

On 27<sup>th</sup> March 2014, the Council approved the appointment of all 23 Computer Application Assistants (CAA) called for the interview, mainly from a list sent by the EPDP to the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE). They were all passed by the selection committee which had besides the Registrar, the **Dean of Management and the Professor and Head of Tamil**. All of them received telephone calls from the EPDP office asking them to come to the same office for a meeting at 3.00 PM on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2014. One applicant said that she received the call on her husband's cell phone, which number she had given the University Administration at the interview.

The EPDP Leader told the recruits that they should join the EPDP Union, and they should work well as there were complaints that their recruits were lackadaisical. He warned that anyone found working against the EPDP would be transferred to the Vavuniya or Kilinochchi Campus and affirmed that all recruitment to the non-academic staff would be through the EPDP alone.

Names were then called out and attendance was taken of those given jobs. Of the 23, two were absent. The Leader then put through a call to a leading university official and connected it to a loud speaker so that all could hear what was said. He told the official that the two who had not reported should not be given appointment letters. **One of them was Sujikala Sooriyakumar, whose case we now explore.**

The Council is the appointing authority and it had finalized the selection. The government may look the other way at the EPDP's insertion into the administrative loop, but has no legal force. Yet only those who went to the EPDP office got their appointment letters by 4<sup>th</sup> April 2014. Not having received hers, Sujikala went to the Human Rights Commission (which had intervened in

her matter before). The HRC pointed out that to withhold the appointment letter was unlawful. The University then promised to post the letter by speed post on the 5<sup>th</sup> evening, but sent it to a non-existent address. Sujikala collected her appointment from the Post Office on the 8<sup>th</sup> morning.

**History of Sujikala's case:** The University had claimed that the CAA selections in 2009 were made by open advertisement. Sujikala had considerable experience as CAA in the University, though on contract. She protested to the UGC and the MoHE that she had not been given an opportunity to apply. The MoHE then included her name in a list along with names given by the EPDP, and after the examination and interview, the selection committee in 2011 approved her appointment.

The Vice Chancellor announced to the Council on 25<sup>th</sup> Jun.2011 that the selection committee had approved the appointments of Mrs. Sooriyakumar and another as CAA III and eight others as trainees. She referred to complaints by some members and a letter by a Parliamentarian (e.g. the EPDP leader) to the MoHE. The Council recorded that the procedures were correctly followed, but due to the hardly pressing need for a further list from the MoHE to fill the balance five vacancies, decided to defer appointments until the next Council meeting. This amounted to an indefinite deferral, leaving those with families who had undergone the tests and interviews for selection waiting anxiously for an income.

Next, the University received a letter from Dr. Sunil Jayantha Nawaratne, Secretary MoHE, dated 12<sup>th</sup> Aug.2011, titled '*Cancellation of Issuing Appointment Letters to CAAs based on Examination Held in 2011*'. He referred to 'many complaints' and wanted the process repeated in a 'transparent manner'. The Vice Chancellor merely used the letter without questioning its propriety to allow the selections deferred for a month to stay indefinitely deferred – in other words cancelled. Nawaratne never said what the complaints were, nor was an inquiry held. (The Council is the final deciding authority on selections, and neither the Minister nor the Secretary MoHE, has any authority in the matter. Despite having held that procedures were correctly followed, the Council did not question the Secretary MoHE's authority in the matter).

The selection drama was repeated the following year (2012). Again Sujikala was selected by the committee. According to the minutes of the council meeting on 27<sup>th</sup> October 2012, the authorities tried to bury the selections on the basis of a phone call from the Minister of Higher Education to 'wait for finalising this matter until further directives are received from him'. Again no questions were raised about the limits of his authority in university matters. Some deans protested and the validity of a telephone instruction was questioned. The Dean of Arts walked out.

Finally, **Prof. Balasundarampillai**, a former vice chancellor and political appointee to the Council '**gave an assurance that he will discuss with the relevant authorities and bring a solution within two weeks...**' Duly a letter of 21<sup>st</sup> November 2012 signed by the Secretary/ Higher education was received claiming, '*I regret to inform you that we have received many complaints against the selection process for the above appointments (i.e. CAA and stenographers). Therefore be good enough to stop above selrctions (sic) until further notice.*' These 'complaints' had not been placed before the Council nor did the Council question the aspersions about the selection. **Was the letter from the Ministry based on the advice of Prof. Balasundarampillai? Was cancelling the selections on contrived political instructions his idea of 'bringing a solution'?**

After the stoppage of the appointments in 2012, Sujikala had gone to the Human Rights Commission in Jaffna (HRC). The HRC wrote to the UGC and the Secretary/ Human Resources UGC, and called for an explanation from the University. The Registrar's response dated 10<sup>th</sup> Sept.2013 was a mixture of fiction and evasion. He said that Sujikala 'was not selected in 2009 based on her performance in the written examination and interview'. In fact she had appeared for neither as she was not on the EPDP/MoHE list in 2009, and her complaint was that she had not then been given an opportunity to apply for the 'selection by open advertisement'.

The Registrar also stated "Reference to decision of the Council on 25.06.2011, on the instruction of the Secretary/MoHE dated 12.08.2011 received (sic), the appointments were cancelled later."

The HRC in a letter to the University in March 2014 considered that the announcement of the selection committee's verdict, which the Council on 25<sup>th</sup> Jun.2011 accepted as done according to correct procedure, amounted to endorsing the selection, which the Registrar failed to implement. They called upon the Council to implement the decision and report to them.

The selections eventually went ahead in late 2013 and early 2014; Sujikala with several years experience, twice selected as CAA was for her temerity sent to Vavuniya as Trainee CAA.

The Vice Chancellor in her response to the HRC on 31.Mar.2014 held that the Council had deferred a decision to the next meeting and since there was no change in the Council decision there is no issue arising. The Vice Chancellor did not say that the appointments were cancelled as the Registrar had claimed. The University was playing with the words deferred and cancelled depending on the audience. It did not dare to tell the injured parties that the appointments were cancelled and there was no council decision to that effect, even though deferred for more than two years amounted to cancellation. This is a pathetic case of institutional dysfunction. The University had been waffling, unable to commit itself to a selection committee recommendation for over two years.

## **CONCLUSION: THE DISEASE AND CURE**

There are many people around the world interested in serving the University and raising our educational standards. Yet, we have seen that Jaffna University's practices in academic recruitment are slowly but surely destroying the academic environment across faculties. We also observed a sharp increase of malfeasance around the time of the Vice Chancellor's election. Many of the complaints we looked into concern the Faculty of Management, whose Dean is reported to have been heavily involved in the VC's reappointment including the production of a dummy candidate. The Vice Chancellor is the final authority over all academic selections and has placed her signature on them.

This University is one where checks and balances have disappeared and power is exercised arbitrarily without accountability. The present power structure could be explained thus: we have on the one hand the Vice Chancellor and on the other the EPDP which enjoys political license from the President and MoHE, who control the UGC. The external council members take instructions from the EPDP in unauthorized pre-council meetings. Internal members, or deans who coalesce around the Vice Chancellor, play a key role as political trouble shooters, having contacts with the EPDP as well as TNA, and become key elements of the patronage system, unless they are capable of exhibiting integrity and independence—something their own faculties

dare not ask of them. A Vice Chancellor or political party can be replaced by another individual and political party, but this corrupt system is likely to survive because it has made strong inroads in the hierarchies of Jaffna society through the cliques and families surrounding the University who contribute their share to abuse in selections.

Departments which comply with bad practices, as with the recruitment of poor quality CAAs in 2009, labourers in 2013 and the recent conduct of Zoology and Fisheries interviews without the slightest protest, condemn themselves to deteriorating quality. Those who come into academic positions on the basis of patronage, and with average or insufficient qualifications, will in their own interests constantly support those in power regardless of the cost to the institution. Once they command decisive weight there will be no opportunity to fight abuses and the University is doomed to permanent deterioration. The favoritism and corruption we investigated with regard to university appointments may be only the tip of the iceberg. For the year ending Dec.2012, the Auditor General has queried expenditures amounting to 36.4 million rupees at the University of Jaffna. We end with one question: Can the process of the deterioration of the University of Jaffna be stopped?

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 1 We recommend that all cases where complaints have been filed be reviewed swiftly and highly qualified applicants that were excluded from interviews be called. To guard against retaliation, applicants who have filed complaints should have their cases heard by a special review board appointed in consultation with the Unions.**
- 2 We recommend that independent persons of repute with an appreciation of university values should be appointed to the Council as external members, and student representatives and academic staff must be allowed to review their qualifications. Internal members should be advised to resign their positions and seek a fresh mandate from their constituencies in the Academic Senate and Faculties. This means starting on a fresh slate where the more independent internal members are not inhibited from speaking out; indeed part of their new mandate must be speaking out against cases of abuse or political manipulation.**