



ஒரு பானை

**Oru Paanai**

ஐயம் இட்டுண்

**Give to the poor  
before you eat**

பகிர்ந்து உண்போம்

**We share the food  
we have**



*An elderly lady carrying  
her dry ration home -  
Kiran, Batticaloa*



*Dry Ration Distribution in Kiran District*



*Well under construction, Mullaitivu District*



*Malnourished children - recipients of Sathu Maa with mothers*



*Dry Rations to Elderly in Tea Plantation sector*

**Oru Paanai: Feeding the Hungry in Sri Lanka  
Newsletter 2022**



*Well under construction*



*Dry rations - Mallavi*



*Annathanam program*

## A message from the Chairman of Oru Paanai, UK

Dear friends, well-wishers and donors,

It has been nearly 2 years since we published a Newsletter. These two years have been very difficult years due to the pandemic. We were not able to organize any fund-raising activities, but at the same time the demand for more help increased. With your generous donations in response to our appeal, we were able to maintain as well as increase our annathanam and dry ration distribution. With a generous donation from Australia, we were able to re-start our educational activities, an activity that was the brainchild of my late brother Mr. Ram Subramaniam.

**As all the trustees are getting old, it is time for the younger generation to step up to the plate. I would like to take this opportunity to invite our younger colleagues to join us active trustees with a view to eventually taking over the running of Oru Paanai.**

Prof. Ram Swaminathan

## Editorial

Vanakkam, friends and supporters of Our Paanai (OP). As Swami has stated above, it is 2 years since we last circulated a newsletter, and the only communications you have received from us in the interim, have been appeals for support during a period when we were unable to stage

any fund-raising events due to the social distancing regulations which have been fully relaxed only recently.

The outbreak of Covid 19 in Sri Lanka also led to desperate appeals for **medical equipment** from hospitals in Sri Lanka, to which OP responded immediately, thanks to generous donations from all of you (see later). It is now time to take stock and decide how OP can continue to operate in this post Covid era, while a fear of catching infection lingers on. The feasibility of staging fund-raising public events is one issue that we need to evaluate carefully, before we formulate future plans.

We are happy to report that OP has been able to continue all of its charitable activities in these two years, with only minor disruptions at the height of the pandemic. **The distribution of dry rations** in all the 12 centres in the north was sustained throughout, except during times when the GOSL imposed curfews. Four new centres for distribution were launched in this period, two in Kiran and Vavunatheevu in the east and two in the tea plantation sector in Belihul Oya and Nanu Oya. Sathu Maa, a cereal based food supplement for malnourished pre-school children, was distributed through the MOH, Dr. Nanthakumar, in Velanai, Kayts and Karainagar.

**Thirty-one wells** were constructed in the Wannu, all traditional dug wells, in conjunction with Well Being, another charity involved in provision of water to the needy.



**Education** has now become a priority activity for OP, with computer / internet-based lessons being supported by us, in association with e- Kalvi, a charity based in Melbourne (see later).

Covid 19 has had a significant impact on the activities of UK based charities working in the northeast of Sri Lanka and several of them have inevitably curtailed their activities. The strong donor base that OP has, has enabled us to largely withstand the adverse impact of Covid 19. The need for support in our homeland has not diminished, and in fact, has increased due to the increase in unemployment, mainly caused by the economic issues affecting Sri Lanka.

The huge reduction in the number of tourists visiting the country, redundancies in the middle east, as well as the lack of demand for our exports in the retail sector in the West, have all combined to produce a perfect storm in Sri Lanka. The support OP has

been able to render in these challenging times has proved to be a lifeline for those we have been able to help.

In brief, then, OP has done well in carrying on with its varied charitable activities. However, this was only possible thanks to the generous donations from our supporters. The marked increase in the cost of living in Sri Lanka has led to an increase in the cost of groceries we purchase to keep up our dry rations and sathu maa distribution and is proving a challenge.

We in the OP Committee are confident that with the ongoing support from you, our donors, we will rise to this challenge and meet our commitment to helping the poor in our home country.

Dr. S.V. Devendra

## **Oru Paanai's response to Covid 19 outbreak in Sri Lanka**

Virtually no country in the world was unaffected by the Covid 19 pandemic. Sri Lanka was no exception, but the initial incidence of Covid 19 in Sri Lanka in 2020 was limited, with cases being confined to pockets in the western province. With the passage of time, the infection spread to all parts of the country, particularly after the Tamil and Sinhala New Year celebrations in 2021 when much intermingling had taken place.

Before long, the situation became critical, and there were large numbers being admitted to government, as well as private hospitals all over the country. Many of these patients needed respiratory support, and the hospitals in the island were ill equipped to treat these patients and had to appeal for support from the Sri Lankan diaspora.

In addition, the imposition of lockdowns to contain the spread of the infection led to many businesses closing down, or at least curtailing their activities, which in turn led to large numbers of people being made redundant and unable to provide for their families.

Although the main aims and objectives of Oru Paanai is to feed the hungry in the north and east, we could not turn a blind eye to this urgent need in Sri Lanka. We decided that we should help out in whatever way we could. We list below some of the ways in which OP responded to this crisis.

## ***Distribution of Dry rations in the north***

A group of medical students in the Jaffna medical school organized a mercy mission during the very early days of the pandemic to distribute parcels of dry rations to the neediest families in the peninsula, buying and distributing dry rations themselves. The families the students chose to help were mostly those whose breadwinner was unable to work during the lockdown. OP made a large donation to this group, which was channeled through Dr.Thayalan Ambalavanar, a consultant surgeon attached to the Jaffna Teaching Hospital.

## ***Donation of Medical equipment to Jaffna Hospital***

Most hospitals in Sri Lanka were short of equipment for ventilating the critically ill patients. OP decided to donate a ventilator, an oxygen concentrator and pulse oximeters, all of which were urgently needed. OP remitted £10,000 immediately, and the money was utilized to purchase all the items quickly. The donation given by OP was once again channeled through the good offices of Dr. Ambalavanar, who mediated with the company importing medical equipment to ensure that there was no delay in the equipment being transported to Jaffna.

## ***Distribution of dry rations in Haputale***

Mr. Skandakumar , the Chairman of OP Sri Lanka, arranged for the delivery of dry rations to several families in the Haputale area who were worst affected by the economic downturn caused by Covid 19 , which was a lifeline to them. This assistance continues to this day, as Sri Lanka has still not recovered from the devastating impact on its economy.

### ***Food supply to patients / relatives in Batticaloa Hospital***

Responding to an appeal from the doctors in Batticaloa Hospital, OP made a donation of £ 1,000 to ensure that patients and the staff who were staying in hospital to assist in the care of the patients were provided with nutritious meals during the most acute phase of the infection.

### ***Upgrading of Bandarawela Hospital***

Most hospitals in Sri Lanka had to be upgraded to Covid Hospitals in June 2021 to enable them to cope with the increasing demand. An emergency committee was formed in Bandarawela to transform the hospital there into a Covid Hospital, and Mr. Skandakumar played a very active role in raising funds for the purpose. OP donated the equivalent of £ 2,000 to this fund, which was greatly appreciated by the doctors serving in the Bandarawela Hospital.

## **Current activities of Oru Paanai (OP)**

### **OP Feeding – Dry Rations**

From the very inception of OP, our focus has been on the alleviation of hunger. After spending over 8 years in the provision of midday meals in over 300 schools in the poorest areas in the north, in 2018, we switched our activities to another neglected group – the destitute, elderly poor, many of whom were barely able to survive on the measly sum of LKR 2,000 provided by the government.

OP launched a program of dry rations (ular *unavu*) distribution to selected destitute elderly, in a number of centres in the Kilinochchi / Mullaitivu areas. In each centre, 30 to 50 recipients were given a bag of basic ingredients, consisting of 5 kg rice, 2 kg rice flour, 2 kg wheat, 1 kg dhal and 1 kg sugar. We estimate that this quantity of basic ingredients should last for around 4 weeks, at the end of which period, they were issued a further 4 week's supply.

These bags were issued from church halls, temple mandapams, social services offices, Olirum Varivu offices or village halls. The areas chosen included Udayarkattu, Mallavi, Kilinochchi, Vadakampirai, Vaddukkodai, Chavakachcheri, Chunnakam, Tellipalai and Alaveddi.

*Dry rations to recipients in Vadakkampirai*



***These dry rations distributed by OP was the difference between survival and starvation to these elderly, as one of the recipients told two of our trustees who visited a centre earlier this year.***

OP expanded its dry ration program to Batticaloa in February 2020, initiating two centres in Kiran and Vavunathivu, with 50 recipients in each centre. In June 2020, OP launched 2 more centres, this time in the estate area, Belihul Oya and Nanu Oya, with 50 elderly being given assistance in each of these areas.

### ***BREAKING NEWS***

***This year, OP has extended its dry rations program to 6 new centres in Oddusuddan, Puthukudiyiruppu, Kilinochchi north and Paranthan, Vavuniya North, Mannar and Chankanai.***

***This would bring the total number of destitute elderly we are helping to a thousand.***

***Plans are also in progress to open 2 more centres in Batticaloa and up country.***

Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the LORD, and he will reward them for what they have done. *Proverbs 19:17*

"God loves a cheerful giver."



*Dry rations in estate area*



*Dry rations to recipients in Vavuniya*



*Sathu Maa packets distributed by OP*

## OP Feeding – Sathu Maa

For the past 5 years or so, OP has been involved in the distribution of Sathu Maa, a cereal based nutritional supplement, to severely malnourished preschool children. The 3 centres chosen for this purpose were Velanai, Karainagar and Kayts and the distribution was done under the aegis of a dynamic MOH, Dr. Nanthakumar. The excellent records of the children's weight gain, which is monitored and kept up to date by midwives, has shown how much Sathu Maa has helped in improving these children's nutritional status.

As with the dry rations program, OP has taken on more centres in Chankanai, Chavakachcheri, Point Pedro and Tellipalai from March this year. We hope to extend our program to Batticaloa in the very near future.

## OP Kaithady

The fund-raising event held in October 2019, under the auspices of OP and the UK Hearing Conservation Council, raised over £35,000, which

was used to purchase a van for the use of the children in the Nuffield Deaf and Blind School in Kaithady, Jaffna. After some unanticipated delays, the van was delivered to Kaithady in August 2021, and is now being put to good use by the children studying there.

## OP Education

OP Education, which was dormant for a while, was resurrected in 2021, thanks to a very generous donation from a Sri Lankan resident of Sydney, Australia. A separate Oru Paanai account is now maintained for education, and disbursements from this account are made by an education subcommittee, consisting of Mr. Skandakumar, Prof. Swaminathan and Dr. Ambihapathy.

OP has formed a partnership with e-Kalvi, an educational charity based in Melbourne Australia, to provide IT based educational activities in some of the schools in the economically disadvantaged peripheral areas in Sri Lanka. These schools are provided Smart classrooms and Pendrives,



*Prayers before annanathanam*



**Launch of Smart Classroom sponsored by OP**

containing lessons prepared by dedicated teachers.

This type of IT based teaching has proved to be a great boon to all these struggling schools which are unable to attract able teachers.

In 2021, OP has paid for a Smart classroom in Kandapola Tamil Vidyalayam in Nuwara Eliya, Kannahi Tamil Vidyalayam and Komari Vidyalayam in Thirukovil in the Amparai district. In addition, we also paid for 100 Pendrives for their use. OP plans to continue to work in conjunction with e-Kalvi to help more schools in coming years.

**OP Wells**

OP's involvement with the construction of wells in the arid region that is the Wannu started in 2014, when a particularly severe drought accentuated the problem facing the people living in the area. Working in conjunction with Well Being, another charity associated with construction of



**Wells under construction and being used by the local community**



## Our Paanai Fundraising 2020 / 2021

### *The Return of RP Shravan*



wells, so far OP has constructed over 130 wells in the Wannai area. In the past year, 31 wells have been constructed, and we hope to increase this to 40 wells in the current year.

One pleasing feature of our program is that in keeping with our expectation, the majority of the recipients of our wells engage in home cultivation (*veettu thottam*), thus fulfilling our hope that this would empower them to have a means of earning a living through this venture.

### **OP and Renewable Energy**

OP is actively considering whether we could undertake a limited project of providing solar panels to selected institutions, thus doing our bit in reducing dependence on fossil fuels.



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**Just visit:**

**[www.justgiving.com/orupaanai](http://www.justgiving.com/orupaanai)**



RP Shravan, the musical maestro from Chennai who had staged a well-received concert in support of OP in June 2019, returned to the UK in February 2020, just before the onset of Covid 19.

Shravan's training as a Carnatic vocalist, and his extensive experience as a playback singer of Sony TV Indian Idol fame, were once again in evidence in the two concerts he staged, the first on the 22nd of February in the Methodist Hall in Coventry, where he was supported by another SuperSinger Fareda, and the second on the 29th in Watersmeet Theatre in Rickmansworth.

Both the events drew an enthusiastic audience who enjoyed Shravan's versatile singing, which was backed by the band Gajan and the Free Birds. His ability to interact with the audience and make them feel a part of his performance was a feature of Shravan's concerts.

Shravan's concert was the last Tamil cultural performance in the UK, as a lockdown was introduced on the 23rd of March 2020, effectively imposing an embargo on cultural shows.



**Swami's 'Thames Walk Challenge'  
Walk – 11/12 th Sept 2021**

Prof. Ram Swaminathan, the Chairman of Oru Paanai, and the indefatigable fundraiser for Oru Paanai, was at his best again in September 2021, when he undertook a 100 kilometre walk, the Thames Walk Challenge, to raise funds for Oru Paanai (see above). His previous fundraising efforts included cycling across the UK, from John O'Groats to Lands' End and from Whitehaven to Hull; cycling from Christchurch to Auckland in New Zealand; cycling across USA over 65 days; and climbing Kilimanjaro - to mention a few. Swami completed the walk over 11/12 Sept 2021, in 25 hours and 50

minutes. His latest effort brought in donations over £3,000 to the Oru Paanai coffers.

**Earle Amerasekera's  
kind donation**

Earle, an active member of the Old Royalists Association, and a close friend of OP Trustee Deutram Thambapillai, requested all his friends and family to make donations to OP in lieu of sending flowers, on the sad occasion of the passing of his dear wife Chandra. His generous gesture resulted in OP receiving a sizeable sum, which was most welcome at a time when we were unable to stage any fundraising events. We are indebted to Earle for his very kind gesture.

## OP Appeals

The constraints of the Covid 19 related lockdowns meant that OP could not organize lunches, dinners or concerts to raise funds. Thus, we were compelled to make an appeal to our regular donors to raise the funds we needed to continue our charitable activities in Sri Lanka.

The first appeal in September 2020 resulted in a sizeable response from our regular donors as well as other kind friends.

We made a second appeal in June 2021 to collect money in order to assist hospitals in Sri Lanka which were struggling to cope with the surge in Covid 19 infections. OP was able to send much needed equipment to hospitals in Jaffna, Batticaloa and Bandarawela, at this time of crisis.

**The Oru Paanai trustees are deeply indebted to our donors, big and small, regular as well as occasional, to whom we express our gratitude, for enabling us to continue to help the needy people in the land of our birth, Sri Lanka, even in these challenging times. We are glad to report that we have not only continued to provide assistance at previous levels but managed to even increase the number of people we help. We wish to express our thanks and gratitude to all the individuals as well as institutions who have extended a helping hand to us and through us, to the impoverished people in Sri Lanka.**

## Fondly remembered ....

### **Dr. Anton Sebastian ( 'Anton' / 'Thilagar' )**

Dr. Sebastian, a retired Consultant Physician from Kingston Hospital in London, was one of the first victims of Covid 19 from the ranks of medical personnel who succumbed to this then new disease.



He had gone back to work in response to the desperate appeal from the GMC for retired doctors and nurses to return to work and help the NHS to cope with the increasing demands on the service, and caught the infection from a patient he had treated. Even though he was well aware of the risk he was taking in returning to work, he did not hesitate to respond to the appeal, a reflection of his compassion and dedication to serving the needy.

Anton's interests in life extended well beyond his chosen career, and he was an accomplished writer, authoring several books, including *An Illustrated History of Sri Lanka*, *Dates in Medicine*, and *A Dictionary of Medicine*. He was an avid collector, and his collections included objects of art / culture, rare coins of South India, Hindu and Buddhist religious artefacts, to mention but a few.

Anton was a keen supporter of Oru Paanai, attending all our fund-raising events over the years, always accompanied by his dear wife, Vasanthi. He contributed many

articles for OP souvenirs, always written in his inimitable style. He will be sorely missed by all of us in Oru Paanai, and the world at large.

### **Dr. Kandiah Ratnakumar ('Ratna')**

Dr. Ratnakumar, a Consultant Orthopaedic Surgeon in Queens / Oldchurch Hospital, Romford passed away in January 2021, another medical victim of Covid 19.



Ratna, who hailed from Chulipuram, Jaffna was educated in Victoria College, Chulipuram and Jaffna Hindu College from where he entered the Faculty of Medicine, Peradeniya. He served his 6-year compulsory service in various hospitals in Sri Lanka, including a spell under Dr. Lakdasa Dissanayake, one of the best-known surgical trainers in the country.

Ratna completed his orthopaedic training in the UK, following which he spent a few years in Canada. Ratna and his wife, Saro, returned to the UK where they both had numerous friends and relatives.

He was appointed to a consultant post in Romford in 2001 and specialised in knee and hip surgery. He served in this capacity for 20 years, retiring a year before his untimely demise.

He was an excellent teacher who trained many juniors, including some from his native Sri Lanka, who are now serving as consultants in his country of

origin. He was a very popular colleague, and a tribute from his hospital spoke of 'how he touched the hearts of so many individuals – doctors, nurses, secretaries, physiotherapists and colleagues' and 'how his patients and relatives adored him'.

Ratna was one of Oru Paanai's keen supporters, and never failed to attend all our fundraisers, along with his wife Saro. One of his last acts before his passing was to make a donation in response to our Covid appeal. Saro continues to support Oru Paanai, hosting an *annathanam* in Mullaitivu to mark his death anniversary which fell a few weeks ago. We will all miss Ratna, and his infectious smile at future Oru Paanai events.

## **The Oru Paanai Team**

### **UK**

Prof. Ram Swaminathan (*Chairman*)

Dr. Ranjit Thambirajah

(*Vice Chairman*)

Dr. Dan Muthuveloe, Dr. S.V. Devendra

(*Jt Secretaries*)

Dr. S. Kathirgamanathan (*Treasurer*)

*Trustees:* Dr. N. Sriskantharajah,

Dr. Nirmala Subanandan,

Mrs. Shyamala Devendra,

Dr. K. Balasubramaniam,

Dr. A.J. Thambapillai,

Dr. Leela Muthuveloe,

Dr. P. Ambihapathy.

### **Sri Lanka**

Mr. Somasunderam Skandakumar

(*Chairman*)

*Trustees:* Dr. Dan Muthuveloe,

Dr. S. Kathirgamanathan,

Dr. K.Balasubramaniam,  
Mr. Chelva Kumaranayakam,

*Project Lead, Jaffna*

Mrs. Muralitharan Anusha Devi  
*Project Assistant*

Mrs. Lily Anugoolan

Rev. Reginald Anugoolan

*Project Field Officer*

Mr. P.Nanthakumar

### **Local Co-ordinators**

Mr. Thangarasah Pirabakaran:

*Co-ordinator, Batticaloa*

Mr. Mallikage Susantha:

*Co-ordinator, Belihul Oya*

Mr. Murugaiya Sujeevan:

*Co-ordinator, Belihul Oya*

Mr. Lalith Sandrasegaram:

*Co-ordinator, Nanu Oya*

Mr. Dharmalingam Abraham:

*Co-ordinator, Nanu Oya*

### **Local OP Assistants**

Mrs. Thangaratnam Sashikala:

*OP Assistant, Kilinochchi / Paranthan*

## **Words of Wisdom**

We like to share with you two ancient Tamil sayings which refer to the act of giving to the poor, in the hope that you will find it inspirational.

இல்லா இடத்தும் இயைந்த அளவினால்  
உள்ளிடம் போல் பெரிதுவந்து - மெல்லக்  
கொடையொடு பட்ட குணனுடைய மாந்தர்க்கு  
அடையாவாம் ஆண்டைக் கதவு.

பொருள் இல்லாதபோதும் தம்மால் இயன்ற அளவு பொருள் உள்ளதுபோல்  
மகிழ்ந்து இயல்பாகக் கொடுக்கும் குணமுள்ள  
மக்களுக்கு மறுமை உலகக் கதவுகள் எப்போதும் திறந்தே  
இருக்கும்.

The gates of heaven will always be open to those who, even if not endowed with great riches, give generously to the poor.

காலத்தினால் செய்த நன்றி சிறிதேனினும்  
ஞாலத்தின் மாணப் பெரிது.

ஒருவன் உதவி என்று கேட்கும் போது அதன் அவசரம் தெரிந்து  
உதவி செய்ய வேண்டும். கொஞ்சம் காலம் தாழ்த்தினாலும்  
அந்த உதவியின் பயனோ பலனோ வெகுமாக குறைந்து போகலாம்.

When someone seeks your help, you must render assistance in a timely fashion for your help to be of great value to the recipient.

A contribution from-

**Dr. Parameswaraiar Ambihapathy**

## Helping Oru Paanai ...

**Oru Paanai depends entirely on donations made by people like you. Every pound we spend has been donated by you. Every pound you give us has been spent on relieving poverty among the poorest in Sri Lanka. Less than 5% of your donation is spent on salaries of staff in Sri Lanka.**

The management and supervisory role by the Trustees and their visits to Sri Lanka are pro bono. Our trustees give freely their time in fund raising, organizing events which are fun to attend and pleading with their friends and family to donate to Oru Paanai, so that we can help the less fortunate in Sri Lanka. With the cost of living increasing by leaps and bounds, the funds we receive do not go quite so far in Sri Lanka, even after the depreciation of the rupee.

**Please consider helping in one of many ways:**

◆ Donate to Oru Paanai. We welcome donations, large or small; regular or occasional. **Use the forms enclosed or you can donate online via Justgiving**

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Visit:

**[www.justgiving.com/orupaanaai](http://www.justgiving.com/orupaanaai)**

◆ If you are already a donor, please consider increasing your monthly donations

◆ Participate in sponsored cycling or walking

◆ Hold small coffee mornings or dinners to raise funds for us

◆ Suggest to guests to a special birthday or anniversary party to donate money to Oru Paanai instead of giving you presents

◆ If you are given a bonus or are the beneficiary from an inheritance, consider donating a tiny part of it to OP so that others in your land of birth may share your good fortune

◆ Sponsor an annathanam on the anniversary of the passing of a member of your family. A meal for 50 people costs only £50 and we arrange for prayers to be said on the day in memory of your loved one. It is a very convenient way to pay tribute to a departed member of your family.

**Thank you so much for joining us in our quest to help the poor.**

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### Oru Paanai

58 Hungerford Road, Stourbridge,  
West Midlands DY8 3AB

Registered Charity No. 1136376

[www.orupaanaai.org.uk](http://www.orupaanaai.org.uk)

Email: [secretary@orupaanaai.org.uk](mailto:secretary@orupaanaai.org.uk)

Charity number: 1136376

### Oru Paanai Sri Lanka

17 Yahalabedda Road,  
Haputale, Sri Lanka

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**[www.orupaanaai.org.uk](http://www.orupaanaai.org.uk)**